

THE AMAZING MR LUTTERWORTH

A man on the run—a man with no memory—a man with a secret. Time running out. Only a few days left for him to remember what he has to do to save the world.

Who is Mr Lutterworth? He doesn't know. What is his secret? He cannot remember. Yet, a major oil company is prepared to pay him a million or to kill him for it. Foreign agents would stop at nothing for its possession. And others—strange others stalk him through the streets of New York.

Against an almost deceptive background of normality the story moves rapidly with exciting twists of plot right across the Continent of America. Imperceptibly it shifts into the hidden spheres of the mind, an unknown country where friend is indistinguishable from foe.

Though it deals with very peculiar matters indeed, this book does, in the light of recent events, leave you with the uncomfortable feeling that some of it may be true—may already be happening. For, sometimes what cannot be stated now as fact can be presented in advance as fiction. And Desmond Leslie is a master of presenting exciting, little-known facts. His *Flying Saucers Have Landed* sold a quarter of a million copies and was translated into fifteen languages. Therefore, in *Mr Lutterworth* we wonder, with an uneasy glance over our shoulder, whether the author isn't hinting of future events, of which he knows more than he's willing to admit.

By the same Author

FICTION

CARELESS LIVES

PARDON MY RETURN

ANGELS WEEP

HOLD BACK THE NIGHT

NON-FICTION

FLYING SAUCLERS HAVE LANDED

The
AMAZING
MR LUTTERWORTH

A Novel by
DESMOND LESLIE



LONDON
Allan Wingate

For
C.S.M., G.A. and H.R.

ALAN WINGATE (Publishers) Ltd.
12 Beauchamp Place, London, S.W.3

*Made and printed in Great Britain
by the Ditchling Press, Ltd.
Ditchling, Hassocks, Sussex*

I

IT IS TERRIBLE. It is the most frightening thing of all. I am nowhere and no one.

I am in space, but not anywhere. I am in time . . . time is returning . . . but time has no meaning. It is dark, horribly dark, for I am no one. I do not know who or where or when. . . . I do not know . . . I cannot see. . . . Darkness.

Darkness or light . . .

I do not know which . . .

Light . . . a plain white infinity . . . nothing to focus on . . .

I am lying down looking at the white . . . Something—a tiny something—a speck on the white giving it surface. It has a surface. I can see surface. It is plain white but it has surface . . . and limits. I see a line where the surface changes.

It hurts; the line hurts.

No, my head hurts when I move it to see the line.

I have a hand.

I can see it and move it. I have a hand and I feel a body. I am lying down on something soft—in something soft. I am covered up in something soft. I am in a bed. The white is a wall, a wall in front of the bed.

I have a head and a hand. My head hurts. But I turn it and I see I am in a small white square place. Light comes through a hole in the wall—a round hole covered by something hanging.

The hanging thing moves away from the round hole and the light grows brighter. Now the thing moves back against the hole and the place is darker.

This happens regularly.

But the hanging thing isn't moving; the whole place is moving. It sways, slowly and regularly. It is unpleasant . . . frightening, for I do not know why it does this.

The hole in the wall is round.

There is a door. . . . On the door something moves; a garment. The garment swings with the thing in front of the hole so I know beyond doubt it is the place that's moving . . .

And it hums

The white walls hum. The whole place hums, humming all around; in the air, in the floor and in the ceiling.

Some form of machinery, obviously.

What machinery?

What does it do?

What's it for?

Whose is it?

. . . Whose? Whose? What's it for? What will it do to me?

. . . I am in danger, terrible danger. I know I am in danger and helpless . . . I don't know who I am . . . But I know *there is something I have to do . . . something terribly important I have to do . . .*

Only I can do it, but I do not know what it is.

. . . Alone . . . am all alone . . .

Until I awoke there was only a blank void, as if life began at that moment. I can think, clearer with each

second, but I remember nothing. Everything is alien and unfamiliar. Head hurts and throbs, the head that belongs to no one.

Look at the door!

Through that door they will come.

What form will they take?

Who are they? . . .

The door is longer than it is wide, so they will walk upright as men.

Must watch the door; watch until they come. Mustn't be caught unawares. Must see them as soon as they come in, and be ready for them.

Better idea . . . don't let them surprise me. Surprise them.

Getting out of bed is not too difficult. Am able to stand up and be ready for *them*. The room gives a sudden lurch (part of their tricks) and I nearly fall to the floor. But I outwit them and don't fall down. They think they have thrown me, but they haven't. I'm not going to be caught as easily as that. I'm going to make my way across the room and open the door carefully and see what they've fixed up for me outside, before they can come in and get me.

. . . Careful now. Open it slowly . . . Strange, it doesn't slide. It swings open when I turn this device. Lucky I found that out before they came, or they might have had an advantage over me.

The door that doesn't slide is, of course, one of their tricks to confuse me, but they won't catch me that simply. Open it now carefully . . .

It's a blind. It leads into a tiny compartment with no exit; a compartment with something on the floor I don't understand . . . I know I should understand what it's for, this white shiny thing with a dark round top

and pipes running into it . . . It's one of their tricks to confuse.

Suddenly there is a sound behind me . . . Another door is opening . . . I didn't see it in time. They've outwitted me, after all . . . too late!

A form appears in a rectangle of light. It moves . . . it is moving towards the bed, it hasn't seen me yet, for it is darker in here than outside.

It stops.

It sees me.

It is angry . . . puzzled . . .

Now it is approaching . . .

Stop it! Stop it!

I know there is something I can do that will stop it and make it powerless. Just a flash, a half-remembered fragment of something I once knew how to do . . . Something I knew long ago, when I was somebody—something that would paralyse—freeze it dead.

It is saying something.

I don't understand.

It is coming towards me, edging away from the open door and coming slowly towards me . . . Now's my chance . . . Now!

I dash forward, but it is too quick for me. It catches me by the arm . . . Blinding pain in my head, sparks and fiery wheels and a closing darkness . . .

The next thing I know I am back in the bed and it is bending over me. There is another being with it, smaller and dressed in white. The head, too, is covered in white with only the face showing . . .

Both faces are peering down at me, talking. One face is faintly like a man, the other a woman. They talk but I don't understand . . .

Then slowly, here and there, a sound or a word means

something, as though I have forgotten how to talk, as though I knew their language long ago and must learn it again . . .

Words here and there: ' . . . half way across the floor' . . . 'scared' . . . 'calm him' . . . 'maybe broken' . . . 'sees us' . . .

His arm is resting near my face and I can see it plainly.

The device on the wrist—gold and red stripes or bands: the rest of his clothing is dark and unfamiliar.

I feel that device on the wrist should tell me something but it doesn't. Once I may have known what it means, but since they have taken away my memory I know nothing.

Perhaps I should humour them, pretend to submit. If they think I am going to lie quietly, they may relax and tell me some of the things I have to know.

He is smiling at me now and saying something soothing. There is no hostility in his eyes, in fact his face is quite kind. I smile in return and try to establish some contact. I try questioning.

. . . Please tell me where I am and why I am here . . .

As he does not reply I repeat the question.

He takes absolutely no notice but begins talking to the woman, as if I have said nothing.

. . . What am I doing here? I insist you tell me . . .

He says something, but it is not an answer. I catch the words: — 'you feel now?' A query.

Of course he did not understand me. How could he? I framed my question in my mind without speaking the words. They cannot understand me unless I use words, words . . . words . . . thought translated to certain sounds produced by the mouth. But what words?

While I am searching for words he sits beside me and takes my hand, feeling for something on my wrist. I

know he should not do that. I can't tell why, but instinct tells me not to let him find what he is looking for. I pull my wrist away.

He scolds; gently, but definitely a scolding.

Slowly I begin to understand. Whether it is the words or the thought or the tone, I am beginning to understand what he is saying . . . 'no need get upset—your friend—want to help you—'.

Like something once learned and forgotten the language is coming back to me. I know it and can speak it. I must make a great effort to understand.

My head throbs.

'Please —' I know it is the right word, for he stops talking and listens attentively . . .

'Please —tell —where I be.' (No, no, not 'be'). 'Where am I?'

I understand most of his answer. I'm definitely improving. It's all coming back to me. The words are all there locked in part of my memory, a little effort and the thought brings the right words to the surface.

'Where am I?'

'You're in hospital, old man.'

'What is hospital?' . . . A place with white walls that hum? A place that rocks backwards and forwards? Some kind of healing device?

'Does hospital always do this?'

I can't find the word for 'rock' at this moment so I make a swaying motion with my hands.

'Do hospitals always rock?' He laughs: 'Not always. Only in a storm.'

STORM. Sudden flash of blue-green vortices and swirling luminescence . . . Storm; a wonderful and terrible thing.

'But do you not have . . .' (the word won't come)
' . . . have things to keep you steady?'

'Oh, you mean stabilisers? No, not on this ship. The *Queen Elizabeth* does, but not this ship.'

'*Queen Elizabeth*' . . . Another flash . . . a girl in a golden robe ascending a throne to tremendous music. Then a crown being placed on her head. Something familiar about the ceremony. I listen to the music for a while and feel reassured. If these people are associated with that, I need not fear them .

'Why am I wearing this hat?'

'It's not a hat. It's bandages. You've had quite a knock, you know, and we've got to keep you nice and quiet.'

'I think I understood all words that time. Let's try again.'

'I'd much rather you got some more sleep.'

Slowly, I am able to say: 'Not now. I have to remember things. Very important to remember. Something I have to do.'

But the effort is terrible.

'All you have to do is stay quiet.'

I concentrate harder. The words are coming:

'But I have to know more—I have a feeling of not being anyone—I feel all scooped out inside. I feel like someone who's killed himself.' The language is coming back smoothly now. I am much happier.

'How does he know how suicides feel?'

The woman says: 'They often get funny ideas when they come round, Doctor. I remember one case of concussion at St George's thought he was the Archangel Michael, and Matron the Devil. Poor Matron got thrust down to hell every time she went round the ward.'

'Well, I think we should make him sleep. Get me another sedative—five grains.'

'Very good, Doctor.'

'I don't want to sleep. I must know who I am.'

'Very well, if it will make you any happier, you are Mr John Hollings Lutterworth of York.'

The name means nothing.

'York? I come from York? Are we going to York?'

'No, you are going to New York.'

'In hospital?'

... Hospital is some form of transport? ...

'I may as well tell you, if it will help you to relax. You come from York in England, and you are travelling to New York in America, about three thousand miles across the ocean ...'

'Ocean?'

'Yes, you are on a ship.'

'But this cannot be a ship. Ships don't move like this.'

'You should have seen it yesterday when you cracked your head. She practically stood on her end.'

'Then do something!—Do it quickly, or we'll get out of control.'

'Nonsense. We've been through worse storms than this. Besides, according to all reports, we'll be hitting good weather tonight and the rest of the crossing should be pretty smooth.'

'Who am I?'

'John Hollings Lutterworth. That's what it says on your papers.'

'I'm not Lutterworth! I would know if I was Lutterworth. I don't *feel* like Lutterworth!'

'My name is Shuttlecock. I neither feel it nor look it.'

'Here's the pill, Doctor.'

'Thank you, Sister. Now then, Mr Lutterworth, just open your mouth, please.'

'I have something to do—something very important to do—something to do—something I must do—do—do—'

Ship rocking . . . out of control . . . heeling over and plunging into the vortex . . . great roaring, fiery vortex . . . chasm of sparks . . . down, down . . . ship destroyed . . . failed in my work . . . *I've failed!*

2

SLEEP AND PERIODS of wakefulness. A little food and more sleep. Periods of light. Periods of darkness.

Suddenly I am fully awake. My head is clear and hurts no longer. It is time to get up and find out who is John Lutterworth; little by little to find fragments of the puzzle and put them together and know what I am.

It doesn't even hurt when I shake my head and find the bandages have gone. But I still don't remember anything.

I find some clothes in a cupboard which I believe are mine. Odd looking things, shapeless and meaningless. These long tubes are meant to cover my legs, and these white soft things on top . . . No, that can't be right. Use your head! How did the Doctor wear his?

Underneath, I suppose . . . like this. Now this white thing on top and the other thing over it.

Like this.

I've got something left over, a long thin coloured thing that narrows in the middle.

I don't know what to do with it, so I leave it behind.

Carefully now. Don't let them see you going out.

I open the door and find a long corridor that seems to curve up slightly in the distance. I walk down it a little way and come to a staircase. This leads to a large hall where there are many people moving, some dressed in blue like the Doctor. As they take no notice of me, I mingle with a group heading towards a large open door. We must have arrived at our destination, for it is light outside and I can see the sky. I follow them out on to a long verandah with high metal windows. Then I see a fantastic sight. Outside there is an endless flat blue-grey plane stretching to a limitless horizon.

But the plane moves.

It convulses and wriggles and surges and breaks into white foam. And the ship is moving *on it*.

For a moment I am completely bewildered at the sight, and that terrible sense of not-belonging returns. But this sight is beautiful. The patterns heave and change and are not repeated. Overhead a heavy bank of clouds break, and a shaft of gold falls to the surface producing a river of fire. Fascinated I watch it until I am aware that someone is approaching and about to speak to me.

I turn to find a tall, bouncy girl in tight black leg-tubes and a livid coloured top. She is smiling as if I am an old friend. Her wide, merry red mouth opens and words pour out.

'Why, Mr Lutterworth! So you're back in the land of the living! My! You gave us a fright!—Well, how are you?'

She has a friendly face and lively bright eyes, but she stirs nothing in my memory.

'Well, don't stare at me like that. Is my nose shiny, or what?'

I am still trying to catch something in her expression,

a familiar widening of the eyes, the way her smile shows her white teeth, something that will let me say: 'Yes, I know you.'

But as yet there is nothing.

'Don't you remember me? I'm Bunny!'

'Bunny?'

'Oh dear! They told me you'd lost your memory, but I didn't know it was that bad.'

'Bunny, I'm very sorry, but I don't remember you.'

'But how awful for you! Oh, you poor darling! But maybe I can help you. Come and sit down.'

I sit with her and begin to question.

I gather we only met after I boarded the ship, which is disappointing. She tells me she found herself put at my table for meals—just the two of us. This poses an interesting point. Did I ask her to sit with me, or did she ask me? I doubt if it would be polite to ask or that I would receive an answer if I did. I gather that someone called 'Purser' arranges where one sits at meals and I suspect that by arranging with 'Purser' one can arrange to sit with whoever catches one's fancy. At the moment Bunny does not catch my fancy; it does not even occur to me whether she's plain or attractive, though I have noticed, in the short time we've been sitting together, that she is considerably more pleasing to the eye than any of the other women I see walking around. She has pleasant, natural movements, suggesting full control of every part of her body, so different to the woman in white who gives me pills.

But my only interest in Bunny is for information; I question her more closely.

'Tell me everything I said about myself before my accident—where was my accident, by the way? Nobody's told me.'

'In the engine-room. You insisted on going down, when most of us felt too sick to stand.'

'Did you go?'

'And get my lovely new sexy sweater covered in grease? Not likely!'

'You mean the power plant of this ship?'

'Yes, the engine.'

That makes sense. I should be interested to see how this vessel is propelled—very interested indeed. I should want to make an inspection.

'We know then that I am interested in machinery?'

'I have a vague idea you said you were some sort of engineer.'

Now we are getting somewhere.

'Good! Did I tell you what kind?'

'Electrical, I think. Or was it electronic?'

The word 'electronic' means little, but I think I understand 'electrical'.

'Do you think I talked to anyone else?'

'Oh, yes, old Professor McPherson. You spent the whole first afternoon with him in the Smoke Room, when you'd promised to play me at table tennis.'

'Surely, I'd have kept my promise?'

'Well, it wasn't exactly a promise. But I thought you would.'

'Then if we can find Professor Mc—what did you say he was called?'

'McPherrrrrr'n', she answered, rattling the 'rrr's in her throat.

'Didn't sound like that the first time.'

She laughs and makes a gesture, letting her hand brush against mine.

'I was only trying to do his wonderful Scots burr. Where's your sense of humour gone? Don't say it's all

been knocked out of you? You used to be such fun.

'You mean I was funny?'

'Funny and fun. Huge fun! That's why I liked you. I wanted to be sick the first day, but you told me such wonderful stories and such fascinating things, I kept forgetting I wanted to be sick. Talking to you made me feel so much better that I actually tried dancing that evening.'

'Can I dance?'

'Divinely. I don't know how you managed it. I'd have been falling all over the place if it hadn't been for you.'

'So I'm an engineer, and I like dancing.'

'You seemed to like everything.'

'How do you know I like everything?'

'Well, we never quite got to that point. I tell you I was livid when you had to go and crown yourself in that stupid engine-room. One never meets amusing men on these damn boats. I was just settling down for a simply heavenly voyage with you all to myself.'

I feel slight misgivings, for there should be no complications. I am travelling alone because there is something very important I have to do.

'Mrs Rainham was livid.'

'Who is Mrs Rainham?'

Bunny wrinkles her nose.

'Bridge! Every afternoon in the lounge from two till six, and again after dinner. "Oh, Miss Marlowe, do bring that nice Mr Lutterworth over to dinner. We'd simply adore to have you two live wires at our table. He looks so sophisticated. Do tell us about it. Is he—er—married?"'

In her own voice she continues: 'Are you, by the way?'

'Married?'

'Do you have a wife?—Double you Aye Eff Eee—Wife?'

'What's a wife?'

'Amnesia can be very useful, can't it?'

'Well, did you ever ask me?'

'No, I never ask a man that.'

'A pity.'

'I'm sure you are married. Everyone is. It doesn't really worry me, but it's nice to know where one stands.'

... Again I feel misgivings.

'Oh, don't look so solemn. I assure you you've behaved like a perfect gentleman—too perfect!' And, to emphasise her words, she reaches over and gently pulls my ear. I don't mind her pulling it. In fact I hardly notice, for I am thinking of other things. But she draws back as if I had suddenly stung her.

'I'm sorry. I shouldn't have done that. It was disrespectful.'

'My dear Bunny; do what you like. It's help I need more than respect.'

There's a strange subdued look about her now. She says nothing for several minutes. And then—

'Mr Lutterworth, you rather scare me. You've changed so.'

'In what way?'

'Something came between us just now—I sensed it when I touched your ear.'

I don't know what she's talking about.

'If you knew how scared I was a few days ago when I woke up and found I wasn't anybody! It's a most terrible feeling not to know who or where you are! But tell me, is there anyone who knew me before I got on this ship?'

'I don't think so—No, definitely not. I remember asking if you knew any of the passengers, and you said "No".'

'I see. Then did I ever mention any relatives or friends?'

'Only that you came from York—I've got an idea! You could ring up York on the radio telephone. Make a personal call to Mrs John Lutterworth. That way you'll find out if you have a wife. If it appears you haven't, then you can call every other Lutterworth they have listed. That way you might find out quite a lot.'

'How does one do that?'

'Oh, Lord! Don't tell me you've forgotten that, too. There's a device called a radio telephone for talking to people at long distance and there's waves or something that carry the message.—Oh, look, it would be so much easier if you were to come and see for yourself.'

She rises and starts down the promenade.

'Mr Lutterworth!'

A reproachful cackle sounds behind. An indignant billow of white comes crinkling towards us.

'Have you been playing truant?' asks Bunny.

'Mr Lutterworth!' The reproaches begin: 'Doctor has been searching the whole ship! Fancy leaving your bed like that without even asking his permission! You've no right to do this to us.'

'I'm very sorry, Sister. I didn't know it would cause him worry.'

'You're coming right back to bed!'

'That will be quite unnecessary. I have recovered—everything except my memory, and I'm now doing my best to get that back as well.'

'But, Sister, he's just going to make a 'phone call.'

'You'll never be well enough to get off at New York on Thursday, and if you're on a dollar allowance I strongly advise you to stay clear of American hospitals.'

'I assure you I am quite recovered. Believe me, Sister, I may know very little, but I do know when I am well and when I am not.'

She is yielding, but with great reluctance.

'Well—granted, I've never seen a quicker recovery. But that may be a false sign.'

'Complications', she adds ominously.

'Give Doctor Shuttlecock my compliments. I shall come and see him when I have made a few more enquiries.'

'As you say, sir . . .'

She looks very doubtful, so Bunny seizes the chance and beckons me to follow her before the bristling woman can change her mind.

On our way upstairs Bunny gets another idea.

'Have you been to your cabin yet?'

'No.'

'Nor been through your papers?'

'No; do I have papers?'

'Everyone has papers, silly—at least a passport.'

'What's a passport?'

'Come on, I'll show you. Then we can put the call through from your cabin. What number is it?—Oh, of course, but you wouldn't know. We'll ask the steward.'

I have a feeling that she knows the number but doesn't want me to know she knows.

A man in a white top with black trousers greets me and expresses concern over my accident. He has locked everything up safe and sound while I was away.

'Here you are, sir. All your documents in the bureau. I locked the top drawer as well.'

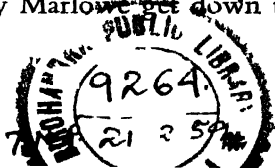
'Why?'

'Well, you never know, do you, sir? I don't believe in taking risks, not with my gentlemen's property.'

'I can't see what should happen to it.'

Bunny is glowing at the prospect of what we may find.

'Now let Detective Bunny Marlowe get down to it.'



Check—cupboard. Three suits, lounge, one grey, two blue. One suit dinner, black. Check. No name tags. No tailor's label. How difficult of you! Everything looks new. So you obviously had a refit in London and got rid of your clodhopper Yorkshire tweeds. Let's try the drawers—Ah! Passport. Hm. Not a bad photo, considering. No wife or any children mentioned.'

'I have fifteen.'

'You remember?'

I shake my head. She said I'd lost my sense of humour.

'Wouldn't put it past you. Oh, there's a wallet—perhaps you'd prefer to do the looking?'

'Go ahead, Detective.'

'Very well: but don't blame me.'

'Oh!' Disappointed.

'What's all that?'

'Money, nothing but money.—Phew! Hundred-dollar bills, too. How did you get those through the customs? But there's nothing else: no bits of paper with telephone numbers and things. just money.'

'Is that money?'

'Don't kid me!'

Then we find *them*.

She has picked up the telep. one and asked the radio room to ring everyone in York called Lutterworth, starting with Mrs John Lutterworth, when I feel prompted to search my clothes again. In the trouser-pocket of the blue suit I feel a small bulge. I put in my hand and draw out a small package made of soft transparent material.

'What is it, Mr Lutterworth:'

'I don't know.'

'Do you want me to go, or something?'

'Yes! Go!—Go!'—She mustn't see it. I know she mustn't see it.

'But I simply refuse. It's not fair to me after all the work I've done—Old Meany!'

She reaches over and takes the package.

'Incriminating Exhibit Number One. Let's open it and learn the worst.'

Before I can stop her she has scattered the contents on the bureau top.

'What—what on earth are they?'

Myriads of tiny tube-like crystals, flashing in the light; iridescent as they roll. For a moment they appear to be alive; tiny bright beings wriggling and tumbling, greeting each other, celebrating their freedom with vivid flashes of coloured light.

'Well, Bunny, you tell me what they are.'

'I—don't know.'

She is fascinated, unable to take her eyes from them: 'But they're lovely—like jewels, but brighter than any jewel I've ever seen.'

Her hand hovers over them, undecided; then she catches one with a swift grab.

'Never seen anything like it—never. But you must know. You *must*. This is the key to the whole mystery. Think hard, John. Think harder than you've ever thought before.'

'May I have it, please?'

She gives me the crystal and I examine it. A little longer than my thumbnail and mounted on an angular gold base; at least, it gleams like gold. I count the tiny angles; nine, all told.

'Nine', I say. 'Nine sides.'

'What a funny number.'

'I should have thought it obvious.'

'An even number is more usual; four, six or eight—John, you've got to remember. Look, you're probably

taking these specially to America. Look! If you're an electronics engineer, they could be samples of something—What's that wonderful new invention that's doing away with radio valves?—Oh, what *do* they call it?—You know the thing I mean?'

'Transistor?'

'Transistor! That's the word—'.

Her eyes show delight: 'But you remembered!—Obviously, if you remembered that word they *must* be transistors. Probably a new British type that is going to make the Yanks look silly. Oh, John, this is wonderful. We've solved it.—There's your call!'

She grabs the 'phone and listens. She turns to me and says casually: 'There is no Mrs John Hollings Lutterworth in York, nor anywhere in Yorkshire.'

She listens again: 'But there is an Ebenezer Lutterworth in York City', and giggles: 'A sanitary engineer. Do you think it could be your father?'

'Do *you*?'

'I doubt it! But does it matter now?'

'You ask him, Bunny.'

The conversation is quite short, for my namesake seems to disapprove highly of people asking silly questions from ships. When she has finished finding out that the expert in sanitation is not responsible for my birth, she turns to me expectantly.

'Well?'

I am expected to make some move. I have a feeling that she wants me to touch her.

'Bunny?'

'Yes?'

'Will you do something for me?'

'Anything to oblige a nice gentleman.'

'Don't tell people about these things. Don't tell a

single person. It would make it much easier for me.'

'Certainly, if that's all you want. I won't tell people. Why should I?'

... Wrong, all wrong to let her see them. Never should have done it. She must forget everything she's seen because these crystals are vital to that thing I have to do ...

I begin to replace them in their wrapper when it occurs to me to count them. She watches me, mentally counting them while I do.

'Eighty-six', I say.

'I made it seventy-eight.'

'Eighty-six!'

'Listen, John. I'm good at arithmetic.'

... The number is important. I know the number contains a clue ... important to get it right ...

I count them again. So does Bunny.

'Eighty-six.'

'You can't add. It's seventy-eight.'

'I'm sorry to contradict you ...'

'Here, let me show you!'

... Stop her ... don't let her keep handling them ... Take them from her.

'All right, no need to snatch.'

'Bunny, you've been very kind and helpful—but I'd like to rest a little.'

'Why don't you lie down and let me stroke your head?'

... Go, go ... She must go ...

'It's kind of you, but I'd rather be alone.'

'All right, I can take the hint.'

... Hurt her feelings. Didn't mean to ...

'I'm sorry, Bunny. I'm not exactly myself today.'

She turns at the door, innocently.

'That's all right, Mr Lutterworth. I was going, anyway.'

After she has left I examine the crystals again; holding them in my hand, closing my eyes and letting them run through my fingers like living drops of cold energy. And as I feel them, the conviction, increasing with every minute, tell me beyond all doubt that these are part of the thing I have to do.

3

CRYSTALS with a nine-sided gold base . . . Transistors? New developments in radio.

. . . Obviously, if I am travelling on an important mission for some Group in England, I shall be met on arrival, and if I listen carefully, and don't say too much, I may be able to re-establish my purpose without arousing suspicion. This I feel to be the best and wisest course.

I spend the whole of the next day (after a vigorous argument with Doctor Shuttlecock, who 'washes his hands of me and accepts no further responsibility') in the ship's library, learning . . . yes, actually re-learning how to read.

It may seem comic to others, but it's highly unamusing to me. . . . There is luckily a children's section, even a simple alphabet. One thing about this English ship, no one takes much notice of you. So I am able to sit in a corner with my letters and primary readers and reconstruct the written language. Hard at first, but after a few

hours my past association with the words brings back whole passages at a time, and I find I am getting the 'feel' rather than the concrete meaning of words I don't know . . . Very important to be able to read and to act normally on arrival.

. . . That money in my pocket . . . Interesting design. Several one dollar bills . . . portrait of a man called 'Washington' . . . The librarian gives me something to read on Washington and I learn that he is the founder of the United States . . . How foolish such thoughts would seem to the fat lady reading a glossy magazine next to me (Mrs Ramham, I believe, who Bunny says is to be avoided), or to the Professor McPherson who was with me at the time of my accident . . .

'I dinna see yer fall, mon. I was awa' inspecting the throost blocks of the screw shaft, but twer the big wave that floored ye', he says when I find him to ask questions.

How difficult he is to understand. I find I can only get the general meaning. But I manage to understand that he and I obtained permission to visit the engine room, despite misgivings from the chief engineer. Apparently I stepped into a pool of oil as a giant wave hit the ship; I slipped, missing my footing on a steel gallery, and fell head-first down a short flight of steps. At least, that is where they found me a few minutes later. That's what they say.

Professor McPherson is angry at me for losing my memory. He says I was the only traveller on board of human intelligence apart from himself.

For the rest of the voyage he stays in his cabin.

But I am grateful to him for the little bits he is able to tell me about myself.

Suddenly I wonder whether I should show him the crystals. Perhaps as a scientist he would be able to identify them.

Suppose he recognised them? Dare I risk that?
I decide against it.

... Back to this dollar bill and Mr Washington ... Interesting device on the reverse side ... more than interesting ... very important ... vitally important.

To the left is a tiered pyramid ... count the tiers ... count them again ... Now I am getting two answers ... Impossible. There is a base and thirteen tiers above it ... No, twelve above it ... Twelve or thirteen ... two ways of counting ... Impossible! I count carefully, thinking of Bunny counting as I do so. A base and twelve tiers—above it is an eye surrounded by a glowing aura ...

I study it for some moments, making my mind a blank ... Strong impression that the artist of this device knows about me and I about him ... Key contained in this symbol part of the key I am seeking ...

On the right is another device ... a shield on an outspread eagle ... *nine* feathers in the tail ... on the shield six white strips and seven dark like the shield in the ship's lounge. Red and white stripes ... old symbol of positive and negative energy ... the universal field ... eighteen feathers in each wing (counting as Bunny counts) twice nine ... and nine in the tail ... five times nine are forty-one ... one and four are five ... symbol of the Race ... counting *my way* ... forty-nine ... forty-nine fires (where have I heard that expression?) seven times seven ... 7 7 7 ...

... Above the eagle's head a group of stars ... thirteen

or fourteen? Something terribly important here. If only I could remember. Must find the originator of this seal. Must do some research right now, before the library closes.

The results are disappointing. The thirteen stars (they say) represent the thirteen original American States. Maybe that is a blind for something else? Thirteen? Twelve jurors and a judge. Twelve elders and a king. Twelve apostles and the Christ . . . Twelve planets and a sun . . . Amazing how things come back when you question your mind and let memories bubble up to the surface . . . But, oh, so confused, mere fragments floating up through thick, dark sludge . . . Must try and correlate these fragments, for they are all part of the thing I have to do.

. . . Research, more research . . . more slow and laboured reading.

Man who designed the seals long dead . . . meaning forgotten . . . Must try and remember . . .

'Ach, there ye are, mon. I been lookin' for ye.'

McPherson drops his ample body into a neighbouring armchair . . .

'Perhaps if ye were to show me yon wee crystals I might be o' help to ye?'

'Who told you?'

Knew I couldn't trust Bunny, that wide mouth, always open and words pouring out. Wretched girl!

'Miss Marlowe thought I could help you . . .'

Difficult . . . hardly know what to say. If he knows, I can't deny it.

'Why d'yer noe tell me afore? I'm pretty well up in all these new-fangled gadgets.'

'Who else has Miss Marlowe told?'

He grins sardonically. 'Only meself, but that Rainham

woman was listening from the next table, ears cocked like a jack-rabbit.'

'Then the whole ship will know. That's *just* what I wanted.'

'Why all the secrecy? If you were a government agent with classified equipment ye'd be gone by air.'

'Not necessarily.'

'But most likely. Look, mon. I'm not tryin't pry into yer, but only tryin' to help yer. Ye tell me ye can no ken, so let me help wi' what I ken.'

The accent and idiom are so difficult to understand and laborious to record. I grasp the general meaning better than words, so my impression is something like this:

'Look, man. As you tell me you don't know, let me help you as I probably know a little more than you.'

'That's kind of you, Professor, but I know that no one else should see the things, whatever they are.'

'It's a pity (again this is the general meaning of his words) that you didn't tell me instead of young friend, Bunny. I'm used to keeping secrets.'

'Are you an alchemist, or something?'

He's disgusted. 'Pshaw! Medieval poppycock! Who ever heard of transmuting the elements?'

'You told me you'd done it with atomic fission, or something. What's that?'

His bushy eyebrows shoot up. 'You mean you don't know?'

'I've told you. My mind is like a broken mosaic: full of gaps. Whole sections are there, but others are blanks. Whenever I ask a stupid question, please answer me patiently, for it all helps.'

'I'm sorry, Lutterworth. I forgot. Sometimes it's hard to believe you've true amnesia, because people don't usually recover that quickly. Most times it takes months,

even years; either that or it all comes back with a sudden rush on applying the correct stimuli. For instance, if you were to be taken now to your home in England and meet your family, you might recall your entire life before the accident. Strange thing, the human brain; very strange indeed. So little we really know about it. But it's my belief your damage is only superficial and that in a few days you'll have no more doubts and worries.

'I certainly hope so.'

After a short pause, he says: 'I was going to tell you about the bomb, the most scientific discovery of all time.'

He does so in some detail and awaits my reaction.

For some moments a feeling of blank despair grips me. The terms he uses are alien but the meaning is clear—and terribly familiar . . . something that happened in my mind long, long ago, and now it's happening again, but worse this time because they know— they know what they're doing . . .

He is watching my expression. I shake my head slowly.

'Apart from the moral issues, Professor, the theory is all wrong. You cannot split an atom. If you did the whole universe would vanish.'

'Nonsense!'

'Not nonsense. All they have done is tear off an (I can't find the right word, so I say) an electrical sheath . . . But why do that? There is more power in the free air in this room: power that is safe, creative and positive, than in all the uranium in the world. It's the wrong approach. It's like—like burning down your house to boil an egg, like trying to fire this ship across the ocean with a huge gun. It's the wrong application. It's negative. Positive force is creative, silent, safe. Negative force is abrupt, violent, wasteful and destructive. They must be insane.'

'One thing we've just learned, my friend, whatever you are, you are no scientist, or you'd not talk like that.'

'Maybe I'm just an ordinary normal man with my head screwed on the right way.'

'All right, Mr Ordinary Man. Show me your magic crystals and we'll see.'

'Very well, if you insist. Come down to my cabin.'

.

'Costume jewellery!'

'I beg your pardon?'

McPherson puts down the crystal and rises importantly. 'Costume jewellery—Something pretty to put on ladies' bracelets. That's all it is.'

He picks up a handful and lets them run through his fingers.

'They're clever, mind you: almost the refractive index of a diamond. One of the newer plastics by the look of them. I don't think it's a true crystal. No need to be, the new substitutes are better.'

'What would an electronics engineer be doing with costume jewellery, may I ask you?'

'Well, they may have a sensible use. Why don't you show them to OMO, the electronic brain people in New York? They might be able to tell you. But, personally, I give as my considered opinion that the gift shops in Madison Avenue will find more interest in them. And now I think I hear the dinner bell, and I'm not even changed.'

I return the crystals to their little bag, and put it back in my pocket.

'One more thing, Professor. Would you show me how to tie a bow tie? I'd like to eat in the dining room tonight.'

He roars with laughter.

'To tell you the truth, man, I haven't the least idea. Never could manage the stupid things. I wear a made-up tie, when I have to. You'd better ring for the steward. He'll show you.'

That is typical of me . . . ridiculous pieces missing. Can't remember how to tie a bow tie. Resent its complex stupidity when my steward shows me. Can't complete every sentence. Am totally ignorant of some of the simplest things, yet I can remember others of extreme complexity. I find meaning where there is no meaning, and blankness in common every-day facts. Like those dollar bills and all that maddening symbolism . . . Yet Washington himself meant nothing until I read about him. Can only imagine this . . . that one's fads and fancies and private intricacies are rooted near the surface and that in the event of blackout they are the first to return. At dinner I ask Bunny what stands out most vividly in her memory, and she replies

'There was a picture in my nursery of a little boy sitting by a stream. I suppose I must have been three or four at the time, but for some reason that picture always comes to mind whenever I think of my childhood.'

I ask Professor a similar question. Is it his science or his discoveries that he recalls most vividly? After a few moments he admits the thing most impressed in his mind is his mother saying 'They took their other ones through the coalshed.' He never found out who 'they' were nor what they had taken through the coalshed. His mother died when he was still a boy and he forgot to ask her in time

. . . Perhaps that's why some of the things I recall seem so unimportant . . . they *are* unimportant.

I don't remember how to tie ties because that is a

mechanical thing, formed of habit; the conscious mind usually thinks of something else when you dress.

That house in the field with the golden sky above it . . . That has come back several times. In the distance there are bluish hills, how far distant I cannot tell, and in the middle of the field is a strangely shaped house, silhouetted against this golden sky.

It must be a house I have known and loved and lived in. Maybe it is Yorkshire . . . But no, I feel that it goes back longer than that . . . like the little boy sitting by the stream and the 'other ones through the coalshed'. This house relates to my childhood.

When I return to England I shall try and find that house. Maybe by then there won't be any more missing pieces . . .

. . . Pieces . . . the largest ones still missing. What sort of person is John Lutterworth, and why is he going to America?

Tomorrow we reach New York . . . I am not tired. I shall spend the night reading. Bunny wants me to go dancing with her. Perhaps I shall for a little, if only to please her and relax myself. I cannot be too angry with her for telling McPherson—She was trying to help.

Costume jewellery! Who the hell does he think he is, or I am?

4

I SHOULD never have danced with Bunny.

She dances far too well, and too close.

You don't have to know what you are to know what a woman is. You need no previous knowledge to know what her arms are saying. They are wrapped around me and they would gladly stay that way until we get off the boat —and after.

The top of her little curly head just below my eye and the warmth of her breath against my cheek is very pleasant, but it isn't what I came to do.

The music is really very bad, tuneless and dull. This isn't dancing, merely an excuse for young ladies like Bunny to hug men who've lost their memory and don't know any better.

There's an endearing innocence in her lack of inhibition . . . her desire for a male is so obvious and so uncaringly hidden that one feels almost unkind, like having a greedy child on one's lap and dangling a sweet just out of reach.

Poor Bunny! This knock on my head was bad luck for you. Whatever else it's done it seems to have given me an extraordinary emotional control. I can look at you floating in my arms, appreciative of your beauty, your exaggerated curves and your supple movements (those movements that bring the colour to one envious admirer now, alas, forced to dance with Mrs Rumbham) but I am no more possessive of them than I would be of a sunset, a piece of music, or words of wisdom. I can touch without desire, tread without wishing to trample.

I am in bed. I have barely selected a book from the pile I hope to finish by daybreak when there is a tap on the door, a quick slithering movement, and she is standing there in the shadows.

'You never said Good-night to me.'

The wide mouth pouts. She has cleaned it of lipstick.

There is nothing to be said, so I don't attempt to say it. I can't because something very curious is happening to me. It's a sensation rather like going up in a fast elevator . . . As I go I seem to be going through expanding layers of cold light, ever expanding, ever lightning . . .

THAT'S IT!

For a flash, for a blinding instant I am about to know. Then, as I cry out, I lose it. The expansion stops and shatters, but the light feeling remains . . . I have become immense and cold, greater and more distant than the stars.

I see Bunny again faintly, her hand across her face. The cry came from her. Without uncovering her face she turns, tears open the door and runs.

The ship gives a roll, the door closes on its own, and I am left alone in the remains of the vibrance that came upon me.

I do not meet her again until we enter New York Harbour when I see for the first time those tremendous towers and the harsh fantasy of modern cliff-dwellings, and I know from my questions that within that gigantic soaring fortress city ten million souls vibrate and struggle for existence, and the thought brings tears to my eyes. It doesn't have to be like this . . . Men don't have to live pitting their frail organism against the machine . . . *I have come to do something about it.*

Peace, deep peace . . . I have come to ease the struggle; ease the pain; to lift up faces to the sun. . . .

His glorious orb beats down upon the sweltering grey

towers, but I see them no longer. I am looking at his face and giving thanks in my heart . . . As I watch the great curving electrical flames arching from his surface my being fills with warmth, for one fraction of the least of these could liberate them forever . . .

I come out of my reverie with some alarm. Shuttlecock warned me about after-effects if I got up too soon . . . Strange fantastic ideas, feeling of not being me . . . standing there looking at the sun feeling as if I was God...

Maybe I am—

God has lost his memory?

Careful!

Wouldn't it be better to organise myself for this thing they call immigration?

Undoubtedly it would.

Fortunately the officer who inspects my papers does not ask too many questions. I am apparently travelling on what's called a 'Visitor's Visa'. All he wants to know is where I shall be staying in America.

Here again I can thank Bunny Marlowe. She thought of that some days ago and suggested I used her address if I needed it. I say 'Eleven East Sixtieth Street' and that seems to satisfy him.

'How long do you want to stay in America, Mr Lutterworth?

'I don't know. How long am I permitted?'

'Your visa's good for three months.'

'Three months then, please.'

'Your first visit?'

'No—er—yes.'

'Hope you enjoy yourself.'

And overhead the sun beats down and his great energies ebb and flow and pour down upon the worlds and bring

life. . . I feel them enter my body, and I direct them up my spine and into my head, and I feel well and strong and a man again . . . But, as yet, a man still without a past or a memory.

I see Bunny for a moment on the dock sorting her luggage. I cross over to say good-bye to her. She looks at me curiously, then breaks into that warm all-or-nothing smile of hers.

'Au revoir, Mr Lutterworth, I hope we shall meet again!'

'I think we shall, Bunny.'

She takes a step forward as if she is about to ask me something.

'What is it?'

Her brow wrinkles.

'Oh, nothing—nothing. I mean, give me a ring if you have a moment with nothing better to do. You know my address? I'm not sure of the number, but it's in the book under 'Hopkins'—'Mr and Mrs Hardwick Hopkins'. He's a playwright. They're both rather divine people. You'd like them and they'd like you. But don't go around scaring them with your hypnosis or whatever it is. 'Bye, Johnny.' She grabs my hand, gives it a quick squeeze, then turns away.

. . . Hopkins? . . . Eleven East Sixtieth Street? . . . Must remember that address in case I have no friend in New York.

'You John Lutterworth?'

'Why, yes.'

'Two thick-set men in grey hats.

So soon?

Now I shall know who I am. Good of them to come and meet me.

'This way!'

They escort me to the street, one on either side . . .

Not a very friendly looking couple, hardly what I expected

We descend to the street in silence. As we appear a large maroon car cuts through the hooting taxis the door opens

One of the men has been pressing something in my back ever since his friend addressed me. Now they put me between them, slam the door and begin to drive away.

'Would you mind if I sat on the outside? I've never been to New York before and should like to see some of the buildings'

The man who is pressing my back opens a wide coarse mouth and lets out a monstrous laugh

'The guy would like to sit on the outside'

'The guy stays right where he is'

'But' he's still laughing 'Aint we been dischitchus? The guy un't never seen America and we I not like him to think bud of our reception committee, would we?'

'Pipe down'

'Aw h ck'

And that is about the entire conversation until we draw up in a narrow street below an immense blank wall

... I do little to revive it for, despite my inexperience, I am beginning to understand exactly what has happened and what is likely to happen. The realisation is not at all pleasant

They were rough and I resented it, stupid and I resented that slightly more. I don't like being tied up and knocked about but I cannot stand people who think I'm inventing stories when I'm not, particularly a couple of morons like these two. I forgot to mention the driver, a thin, rat-faced little man with slightly more intelligence than his friends, but unfortunately an intelligence applied

to finding more ingenious ways of causing me discomfort.

... Yet I am curiously detached. I seem to be looking at myself as if the man trussed and helpless was not me but another . . .

'Where's the blueprint?' a coarse face keeps repeating, and the man on the chair, the man that is somehow connected with me, shakes his head . . . 'I don't know—I don't even know what a blueprint is.'

• The Rat-face hits the man in the chair and again I feel pain. But I shouldn't feel pain . . . I shouldn't; I know I shouldn't! Impossible and stupid that a body—that body tied to the chair—should make *me* feel pain. It's all because of something I've forgotten that I feel pain . . . pain when the man in the chair is hit . . . A body, my body . . . something I have got into and thought of as myself, that's why I feel pain.

... Stupid that I should be hurt. Stupid! Unnecessary! Untrue! Something gone terribly wrong to let it hurt me. Stupid! Stupid! Stupid! Wrong! Wrong!

It is like being at the bottom of a well. I've been at the bottom of a well since I found myself on the ship. I've slipped into something that isn't me . . . isn't true . . . something that can hurt and frighten . . .

Far away I see them cutting open my clothes and my luggage. But that doesn't hurt. No, it doesn't hurt when they tear clothes, only when they tear the thing on the chair, the thing I think is me, stupidly, falsely.

Crystals lying on the table. They've found them long ago but they want something else, something blue, a print, a blueprint, a blue thing I don't have—don't know about.

It is terrible and wrong to think those bodies can hurt . . . Do *their* bodies hurt? If I hit them, would they hurt, or is hurting something only for me? They must know the man on the chair could be hurt or they wouldn't do

these evil things. So perhaps they can be hurt, too: . . .

Could Bunny be hurt? That gentle lively body? Could it feel like this?

Yes, yes, all these bodies can be hurt. That's what's wrong; that's what's so unnecessary, only because I've forgotten.

The Rat-face is right over the man on the chair, through whom I see the ugly eyes, the twisted mouth and I feel afraid—afraid that a face could look like this. And yet I know how to stop it. The man on the chair doesn't know, but *I* know there is a thing I could do (I, not the man on the chair), a simple thing, a true, a mighty thing that could make these grinning monsters helpless, as if a certain effort made in a certain way would paralyse them, break my bonds, fade them out like wisps of a bad dream. But the man on the chair who thinks he is me doesn't know this, and he is getting so far away—I can't help him . . . far away . . . falling away and falling away and not hurting me any more . . .

But he comes back. He comes back and becomes me again and I see all the mess around me; the torn clothes, the ripped-up luggage and the evil faces peering down and one throwing water in my face and the same ugly voice saying something . . .

The man in the chair who is me says: 'There isn't a blueprint—I don't know—don't know—'.

A voice, near and close, says: 'Look mister, stop being so goddam smart. We're not tired. We can go on like this till you get wise. And if we get tired others will take over, right on round the clock—round the clock.'

Then, somewhere in the noise, a bell rings, and somewhere I think I see someone speaking to one of those telephones, then an enormous exploding silence.

.

The faces are re-appearing, are looking at me . . . They're not smiling now, they're frightened. They are frightened of something . . . frightened of me. This has something to do with the telephone ringing. That's why they are afraid.

When they see me awake and looking at them, the Rat-face shambles towards me: 'Gee, mister, we're sorry: we didn't know——'.

- ———'Only did what we was told——'
- ———'Boss says to get the blueprint——'
- ———'Never said how to get it'——
- ———'I didn't know who you was'——

Rat-face again: 'We gotta get you cleaned up and outta here——'. 'That's what boss says, "Clean him up and fix him up nice"', he says.

'Boss? Who is boss?'

'Don't ask questions if you know what's good for you.'

Tiles . . . something shiny . . . a bathroom . . . the man on the chair being dragged into a bathroom . . . not to hurt him; to clean him. Don't resist: let them clean you.

Something cold and soothing on my head, something hot and good in my mouth . . . They take the cold thing away.

'Leave it!'

They put it back. It feels good and I keep it there till they get impatient

'Boss says to get you outta here!'

They help me dress. They are awkward and stupid and trying hard to help me feel better. They've stopped hurting me so I don't have to think of the blue thing I've forgotten, any more.

No, I'm not angry with them. Can't hate a toad for being ugly. Can't hate things like these for not being human beings . . . They walk in deep sleep and are stirred

only by violence. Frightened creatures, they have never looked into the sun.

'Where's my luggage?'

Shamed faces produce it—what's left of it. Shamed ape-faces have been very thorough, but shamed awkward grinning ape faces have found nothing.

'I'll just take the shirts.'

Another stupid ingratiating grin and clumsy hands make a clumsy parcel. 'There, sir, real fancy, gifts wrapped.'

Rat-face gives me the crystals.

'You're giving me these?'

'We was told to give you everything.'

'Even these?'

'Everything.'

'So I'll lead you to my friends, is that what your boss thinks?'

'See here, Mister Tutterworth, if you know what's good for you stop asking questions. Just get outta here before that phone rings again and someone changes his mind.'

'Yeah, you want to get outta here before he does that. You got us in plenty trouble.'

The faces nod in agreement; they look intensely sorry for themselves.

'We'll help you to the street.'

'If you're going to follow me, just say so. It would be easier all round.'

'We ain't gonna follow you, are we, boys?'

Grunts of assent.

'No one's gonna follow you.'

Outside now, outside in the grey cleft of a street,

outside and alone and nowhere to go; alone and shut in by harsh soaring grey cliffs, hysterical towers, insanity of windows, hemmed in and pressed down by ugly primitive violence, bestial pointless violence; cannot shake it off . . . It is still with me, in my head, in the cliffs, in the screaming windows, the stinking traffic; hemmed in, hemmed in. I feel I've been swimming in a sewer . . .

All those windows . . .

People inside them. People like me, or not like me? Do they get hurt like this or are they different? Swimming in a sewer . . . still in a sewer . . . still in a sewer . . . cannot shake it off . . . Am I being followed? Don't know, head hurts too much to think . . . Take a taxi . . . It says 'Taxi' on the top, so I know it's a taxi . . .

'Where to? I don't know or care. Just drive me around. Open all the windows!'

The driver is worried at my appearance. Yes, he's upset to see me look like this . . . So this man is different. It worries him to see another man hurt. Here is hope. Here is one man who isn't like them, a man who wants to help, who drives me to a place he says is a drug store, who takes me inside because he wants to help.

The man in the drug-store, white like the nurse, white like Doctor Shuttlecock, has a kind face, is worried about my cuts and goes to get some things he says will help me. Strange place, this drug-store . . . People eating at one end, and people buying things at the other end to take away the pain they've got from eating too much at the first end. Thousands of bottles and packages, and things to take, and advertisements telling you how ill you are to make you take them.

He offers me a choice of many things.

'Do they all have the same effect?'

'Sure'

'Then why have so many?'

'Drugs are a billion dollar business', he says with pride.

I buy something to please him, for he has been kind. But I don't need it now for I remember a better way of stopping the hurt . . . When I have done that I feel tired but at peace. I can walk out into the street and not be hurt by the enormity of it. It no longer matters.

Now I like walking, for I know the thousands in the streets are not like the monsters but like the taxi driver, and like the kind man in the drug-store who was sad to see me hurt. These thousands I know are the normal man, the man I have come to help. I can look at them and be at peace with them; with myself. Soon the cliff-streets end and there are trees and rocks and a small lake, and children playing and people sitting in the sun. And a little way away are a row of tall glittering buildings that seem to have something to do with me and the reason I came here. These buildings are not places of danger so I can go and look at them and see what they want to do. They seem harmless enough, and the people coming in and out seem friendly, and none of them are interested in me. I stop by a doorway as I see the word 'HOTEL'.

A hotel is a place where you can stay, can lie down and rest and not be troubled by other people. So I walk into a huge busy hall. Men in grey uniforms look at me suspiciously and one comes over and asks if he can help me, but I don't think he really wants to help.

'I would like to stay here and rest a little while.'

'See the clerk at the reception desk.'

He points out a man in a grey suit behind a long table. I speak to this man who is not very friendly. Perhaps I have come to the wrong place. These men don't like me . . . danger.

'Where's your baggage?'

'I'm afraid it got lost on the way from the docks.'

He doesn't like me, is suspicious just because of my appearance. He can only see my clothes, my crumpled clothes, not me.

'This hotel is full—No, I couldn't suggest another—Downtown maybe.'

'But I want to stay here, not down-town.'

'Did you make a reservation?'

• 'I don't know: did I?'

'Who are you?'

'Lutterworth, John Lutterworth.'

'Lutterworth?'

'Have you nothing for me?' I don't know why I said this; the words simply came into my head and I said them.

'I very much doubt it.' Grudgingly he turns away and looks through a lot of papers—letters, I think.

'You John Hollings Lutterworth?'

'Yes.'

He hands over a long, thick envelope.

'For me? Are you sure?'

'If that's your name.'

'But I only just made up my mind to come here.'

'You asked me if I had anything for you!' He's getting cross.

'Then who left this?'

'Couldn't say!'

'But who knew I was coming here? I didn't know myself. I don't even know the name of this hotel.'

'The Sherry Plaza!' Offended now, and more suspicious. 'And how do I know you're the fellow that letter's for? Where's your identification? Yeah, your papers, some identification?'

'I've a passport, if that's what you mean.'

'Let's see it then.'

He studies it, grunts, seems satisfied.

So I, the reality, am not a reality without a bit of paper that says so; not a man unless something else says he is. Nothing is what it seems.

I tear open the envelope.

Nothing.

Nothing but nine one hundred dollar bills. No note, no message, only some money.

Disappointed and bewildered I turn to leave when the clerk voice calls after me. The clerk face has changed now, smiling and helpful, and the clerk voice is friendly and ingratiating.

'I'm sorry, sir, but we have to be careful, you know.' He laughs sympathetically: 'Reckon you're lucky they didn't cut these off you.'

'Who?'

'Well, you've been in a fight, haven't you?'

'Does it still show?'

'Sure does. Tell you what, sir: why don't you take a room and rest awhile? I'll send the house physician and the masseur right on up. We've steam baths, too; the best in town.'

'I thought you were full.'

'Yeah—but I just remembered there's a good suite in the Tower vacant; seventy-five dollars plus tax. sound-proof, too.'

'I just want one quiet room.'

'Room? Thirty dollars, on the thirty-second floor, overlooking the park. Could give you one with a private terrace so you won't hear the traffic.'

'That sounds very good. Thank you, I'll take it. Now. I need some new clothes and a suitcase.'

'Why don't you get some rest, and I'll have the tailor come to see you.'

'You're very kind.'

'Not at all, sir; this is the Sherry Plaza!'

.

Sleep, and in the dozing twilight a man with strong, supple fingers eases away the aches in the body that tried to be John Lutterworth: sleep and supple fingers and a place that is hot and wet and soothing, where men wearing towels do all they can for a stupid painful body.

Sleep and a doctor, a doctor who says he is a specialist in repairing the ravages of celebrations that get out of hand. But I don't really need him for I am already finding out how to be myself again. So that by morning I can really enjoy the breakfast they serve on my terrace for me; out on my terrace alone in the sun.

A boy in a buttoned suit brings me a letter. A message: The letter I have been waiting for?

The boy is evidently impressed for it was sent round by hand and on its stiff clean covering a legend says.

GLOBAL OIL CORPORATION
OFFICE OF THE VICE-PRESIDENT

The boy is waiting for me to do something.

'Why are you waiting?'

'Tip.'

'Nothing like coming to the point.'

'That's right.'

'I'm rather new here. How much should I give you? Two dollars enough?'

The youth considers, looks at the letter, concludes my offer acceptable, pockets it, leaves whistling.

The letter is handwritten and polite, asking me to lunch with Hasley B. Widlow, Vice-President of Global Oil . . . Would I call at my convenience . . .

I call.

Charming girl voice answers respectfully: 'Would I care to lunch today? I would? That's just dandy . . . Mr Widlow will be so very delighted. His car will call for me at a quarter of one.'

At last I shall know why an English electronics engineer (according to his passport) should come to America with some crystals (costume jewellery, according to the expert scientific opinion of Professor McPherson): crystals of such importance that I am beaten up on landing. I may also learn why I walk into the first hotel I see to find someone has left me the best part of a thousand dollars. Perhaps that was Mr Widlow's way of saying 'Welcome to America'. We shall see.

At half past twelve I again count my crystals. Still seventy-seven just as those thugs found them' . . .

Oil . . . So this has something to do with oil . . .

Oil . . .

At twenty to one I take them downstairs and have the people in grey suits lock them up where they will be safe. And at a quarter to one I am whisked away in a vast Widlow car that is studded with little buttons. You press them and things happen, windows open and shut, seats move about, lights go on and off, music comes out of holes, and a row of bottles and glasses comes out through a panel. I have hardly finished pressing all the buttons before we arrive at a huge tower called 'Global Oil Building'. This, more than the car, tells me that by their standards Mr Widlow must be a very important person. A lofty entrance hall, high and like a temple, a series of polite officials and a private guarded elevator soaring up to the fifty-third floor. The fifty-third floor seems to be occupied entirely by Mr Widlow and comely girls seated at impressive tables or gliding silently over carpets

that shift under foot. An older lady in glasses leads me through sliding doors to an impressive room made almost entirely of glass. The effect is startling; it is like coming suddenly upon a working model of a tiny city stretched out below the huge plate windows.

A large man rises from the largest table I have seen and strides towards me smiling.

'Mr Lutterworth! It's good of you to come. I surely do appreciate it!' A powerful handshake, an overpowering welcome.

A big man, wide and wide-faced, no hair on his head, an immense head, powerful eyes—the man I came all this way to meet???

Careful!

'What'll you have? Rye, Bourbon, Scotch?'

'Do you have some fruit juice? Orange?'

'You kidding?' He bangs me on the back and laughs.

'Doctor's orders.'

He's studying me carefully. Interesting face, wide face, small thin smiling mouth, but cover up the mouth and look at his eyes. they give the feeling they've never smiled.

'How long have you been under doctor's orders, Mr Lutterworth?'

'Nearly a week.'

'A week?' A flicker, a slight movement near the small thin mouth. That wasn't the answer he'd expected.

'Well, you look in pretty good shape to me. How do you find New York?'

'Very hospitable. You should have seen the reception I had.'

Again that small flicker—a flicker of suppressed amusement . . .

'So you have friends here?'

'They may have been somebody's friends, certainly not mine!'

Quickly he changes the subject. 'I thought we'd lunch up here. I could take you to "Twenty-one" but there's too much noise to talk and sir, I really want to talk to you.'

'There's many things I want to talk about to you, too.' Now it's my turn to smile at a secret joke. I shan't tell him about my lost memory . . . not until I know who he is . . . if he is.

Hasley Widlow is waiting for me to say something important, so I deliberately make small talk until doors open, waiters and gleaming trolleys glide in, and Widlow seats me at a minor banquet. I feel he is not the type to waste time with slight conversation and that he is impatient to come to the point.

He is offering me some wine.

'Sure I can't tempt you?'

I shake my head.

'Quite right! You obey doctors. You're a very important man.'

'In what way?'

He laughs loudly. 'What way? What way, he says! That's good! That's really good!' Confidentially. 'Come on, John, I know what brings you over. I know your secret. Why do you think I asked you up here today?'

' weren't you expecting me?'

'Sure, I was expecting you!'

. . . Ask him about the money . . .

'You didn't leave anything for me at my hotel?'

'Why, no. No, we didn't leave anything at the Sherry. Thought you'd be at the Waldorf.'

'Why the Waldorf?'

'It's more usual. But the Sherry's a fine hotel.'

'You really had no idea I'd be staying there?'

'None at all. Matter of fact, we had trouble tracing you.'

'But you *were* expecting me in New York?'

'Heard you were on the ship. If I'd had a little more time I could have received you better.'

... So he knew about the ship ... but not about the nine hundred dollars ... Go carefully ... don't tell him too much.

'Sorry to hear you had a bit of an accident on the boat. Was it bad?'

'Not really bad. Just inconvenient.'

'You don't suspect an accident on purpose, do you?'

'It never occurred to me till yesterday.'

'Could I be, you know, with the things you're carrying — — (Oh, come on, John, no need to look at me like that. I know what you're selling and I'm ready to buy. You can forget any other offers you've had: no one can touch what Global's prepared to offer. No sir, no one!'

I say nothing ... nothing I can say without betraying my ignorance. He waits for me to speak, then continues: 'You can't be too careful. It struck me you may have been hit on the head and robbed of something?'

'Like what?'

'Papers—a blueprint?'

... that blueprint! ...

'A blueprint of what?'

He smiles again.

'You don't need to play cautious with me. We want to make you an offer—and a big one.'

• 'Is it really so important?'

'One thing I like about you Britishers is your sense of humour. That dry way you have of belittling things. Reckon I must try it some day O.K., John, I'll lay it

right on the line. If this thing works, we'll pay half a million down, and royalties to be agreed.'

'I can't help laughing . . .'

'All right; if half a million's not enough we'll talk again. But you won't find anyone else paying our kind of money.'

'I'm not laughing at you, Mr Widlow. I'm laughing at myself. Here you are offering me fortunes when I don't have anything to sell.'

'No'—Then maybe this will show you we're in a better bargaining position than you think.'

He gets up and unlocks a small drawer in his desk, returning with something in his hand. He throws them down on the dining table; two small rainbows of gleaming crystal. 'See those, John. We've had them quite some time. No, these aren't yours. We bought them fairly in good faith.'

'From us?'

'Not from you, no. From someone right here in this country. We thought they were the only ones until you came along with your seventy-seven just like it. So you see, Mister, we can play tough if we want to. But we don't work that way. No, sir. And now I'm sure you'll appreciate that half a million is a very generous offer.'

. . . Seventy-seven he said . . . important . . . remember it . . . seventy-seven, not seventy-eight . . .

'Do you want to buy mine?'

'Not necessary. We can make all we want when we've cracked the formula.'

'And have you?'

'We're making progress—making progress. But what we *do* want is the blueprint or a working model that goes with it.'

This is it! he's waiting . . . waiting for me to say something.

'Mr Widlow. It's no use playing with you. Whatever this thing is I don't have it.'

'But you can get it: get us a blueprint, that's all we want, just the blueprint.'

'No.'

'Why not?'

'Because I don't even know what it is or what it looks like.'

For a moment the mask breaks, cracks into cold ruthless fury; is quickly controlled.

'But you must know it! Goddamit! You're the inventor!'

Stunned . . . am stunned for a moment . . . I the inventor and don't even know what I've invented . . .

Then he smiles, fatherly and kind: 'Sure, boy, sure I understand your caution. That's what I like about you. You don't go around blabbing your big mouth off like some of our guys. Sure I respect your wisdom.' He pauses and expands: 'But you can trust me. I'm your friend.'

'But how do you know I'm an inventor, and how do you know what I've invented?'

'Only Number One on the project would have all those crystals with him. Wouldn't he?'

I cede his point.

'And only Number One would know the whole formula and the method of operation.'

'Am I Number One?'

'Well, aren't you?'

'I don't suppose it would convince you if I denied it.'

'Son, you needn't hedge. I'm on your side. I want to help you place this and make it the biggest thing since

Papa Damlar produced the first internal combustion engine.'

'Truthfully I can't see how I could be of use to you.'

'That's good! That's really good!' He laughs, a shocking laugh. 'A man who produces a motor that will decrease gas consumption by two thousand per cent says he's no use to us!'

'A motor?'

... Play him ... get it out of him ...

'Well, maybe not a motor exactly; a small attachment to the carburettor, to be more precise.'

Shrug ... shrug as if it were nothing ...

'Two thousand per cent!' he bellows. 'That means an auto normally getting fifteen to the gallon should be able to run three hundred miles to the gallon, or right across the States on one tinkful. Do you estimate what that would mean?'

... Of course ... I see what it would mean in a flash ...

'For one thing it would mean freight costs would go down drastically and life would be made much easier for many millions ... particularly in the under-fed countries.'

... Yes, I know about those countries, and they have plenty to do with why I am here ... plenty.

He thumps my back. 'John, you're a man after my own heart, unselfish, idealistic, a true human being. I'm all for helping the under-fed regions. Say, do you know what Global gave last year to the Ganges Valley Rice Scheme? — I'll tell you what we gave. We gave two hundred thousand dollars. And do you know what they did with that two hundred thousand dollars?—They bought food with it. Surplus wheat the American farmer couldn't sell.'

'And' with this gadget the food could be transported much cheaper.'

'Yes; it's a swell invention. It's great! It's terrific! It's so big that only something as big as Global can handle it!'

'How do you propose to go about it?'

'You leave that to us! We've had this kind of thing turn up before, economy carburettors, new type fuel atomisers. We buy one up every few years—and we pay well!'

'And has there been an improvement in gas consumption?'

He laughs, mistaking my ignorance for sarcasm: 'Hell, no! You've got to go careful with these things. You can't just have General Motors fit them to next year's models as if it were a new type transmission or a snazzier bumper. You got to handle this kind of thing carefully, very carefully. Why, we've had a million-dollar research department working on them for the last twenty years.'

'Then, surely, you've got results without new inventors coming in?'

'Course we have: there's little we don't know about improved gas consumption. Why, right now—before those tubes of yours came on the scene, we could have produced a motor that would do one hundred miles to the gallon. But what good would that do?'

He pauses as if waiting for me to answer.

'I'll tell you what it would do, John. It would put a lot of people out of work, people with wives and families to support. Little men and big men, all the way down the line.'

'Temporarily, perhaps, and only in oil.'

'John, do you know what would happen if news of this gimmick even leaked out?—I'll tell you what would happen. Oil shares would drop eighty or ninety per cent.

There'd be a panic to sell. And if Global dived, Standard Oil could follow, and all the little companies, too. And if oil fell, do you know what that would mean? It would mean a market crash; and I mean a crash—a crash like twenty-nine. Think of it, John; half the country unemployed, bread lines, plants closed—Communism!

He sits back, moved by his own eloquence.

'I'm telling you, son, we're handling dynamite, and we've got to handle it safe.'

'You mean suppress it?'

'I never said that. All I'm saying is that revolutionary inventions have got to be handled safe and slow—You can't just put a thing like this on the market and expect everyone to live happy ever after. Oh, no! You've got to introduce it slowly and carefully. I've got the finest team of economists in the country working for me, and I'm not doing a thing without them thinking good and hard; that's what they're paid for.'

'How long would you wait?'

'Ten—twenty years. Maybe we'd make a start in aviation with trans-continental bombers. Cut down the fuel and step up the bomb load. Yes, that might be the best way to start—best for everybody.'

'But you wouldn't do that without your experts approving?'

'Sure thing, I wouldn't. And not without consulting Esso and Texaco and the other big boys either. We may be rivals, but we don't cut each other's throats. No, sir: we're civilised and we act democratically.'

'How do I come into it?'

'Write your own figure.'

'For what?'

'Son, if my information's correct, there's others just as anxious to get the secret as we are—and I don't mean

only American firms. No, I don't mean this side of the Iron Curtain.—I'm an American. First and foremost I'm an American, and it's my solemn duty to see this important invention does not fall into enemy hands. Come, John, you're British: you're our ally and friend. You know you've got to work with us.'

I pause, there's something else I must find out. . . .

'Are you quite sure I'm the only man with the secret?'

'Oh, you mean Minovsky? Glad you mentioned him.'

'Who's Minovsky?'

He looks at me sternly.

'Son, you wouldn't fool me?'

'I don't go around fooling people.'

'You mean, you really truthfully mean to tell me you don't know Minovsky?'

'No.'

Widlow is silent, speechless except for a suppressed oath.

'But if you didn't give them to him, who did?'

'Gave what to him?'

'These—these goddam crystals; these two here. Jese! If you didn't give them to Minovsky, that's bad. Now we don't know how many mobs are in on it.'

'Who's Minovsky—a Russian?'

'I'll tell you. Don't get excited, keep calm, don't get excited! Minovsky's a crank, a pollack, I think, living in California and just about the damndest trickiest customer you ever had to deal with. He had a couple of these things in his possession when we first got wind of them.'

• 'Perhaps he's the inventor?'

'The guy's no technician; could hardly drive a nail in straight. Sits about most of the time writing cockeyed philosophy thar no one will publish. He lives up on top

of a mountain, a kind of hermitage; but since my boys went there he won't see anyone. Sets the dogs on you and calls in the troopers the moment you set foot on his ground.'

'That shouldn't worry you!'

'The troopers don't. But have you ever tried dealing with a crackpot?'

'Why bother, if you've got his crystals?'

'To get the blueprint, of course.'

'There's only one thing I can't understand. Here you are offering me a half a million dollars for an invention you've never tried out. You don't even know it works.'

'Payment will be made on conclusion of the first successful test.'

'But you've never even seen it. All you've seen are a few crystals which I was assured on the ship by a gentleman of great scientific learning are only costume jewellery.'

Widlow explodes, laughing.

'Costume jewellery! Isn't that just like a knowall scientist for you? If I pinned all my hopes on these technicians—oh, no offence, of course, —I'd not be where I am today.' He comes up behind me, placing a heavy hand on my shoulder. His voice drops, becomes almost gentle. John, he says softly 'Do you believe in Other Things? Are you a scoffer, or do you know of the "Great Beyond"?''

Before I can reply he answers 'Because I do. And I doubt there's a man in my position today who's a materialist. No, sir, materialism and atheism's a fool's game. Why, even those crooks in the Kremlin have their tame mediums and astrologers, mark my words. Read your history! Every court had its soothsayers and prophets, and good ones, too. They had to be good, or heads rolled. No one with our responsibility can afford

to take chances. All my friends in big positions know the value of advice from another plane.

'I'm not an atheist, Mr Widlow: at least, I don't feel I am; but what's it got to do with our problem?'

'Emerald Van Elb—Ever heard of her?'

I shake my head.

'One of the best mediums alive. Told me the exact date the Korean War was going to end. Gave us time to prepare.'

'How does she fit into this?'

'Emerald used to be a disciple of Minovsky; but they split after a quarrel. Minovsky accused her of faking. 'Course, the man was jealous he couldn't do it himself. So she broke with him and set up her own group. You should see the lovely temple they've got there now out in California. I gave her the cash to set it up. She's a good woman, is Emerald, one of the best. Do you know I've already made a two hundred percent capital gain on my original investment?'

For the first time something in me violently objects to Mr Widlow's philosophy. Somehow I never regarded the All-Father as a kind of cosmic investment trust.

Widlow continues

'Emerald found the first tubes one day when Minovsky had gone down to Los Angeles to lecture. She was clairvoyant enough to know they were important, as soon as she held them in her hand. She was hurt, I can tell you, real hurt that he'd kept them from her. Anyway, on his return she asked a lot of questions. He accused her of stealing the tubes. Naturally, she got mad at him and he got mad at her; so the outcome is, she picks her bags and leaves. But Minovsky's a fool. He needn't think he could keep anything secret from a girl like Emerald. Oh, no! Once she's well away from his false vibration, she's

able to get a clear message as to just what those tubes are. Now Emerald's an old friend and a loyal one, so she planes off to New York, and before Mister Elias Minovsky knows what's happened, those tubes of his are sitting right here in my safe.'

Oil boss . . . a medium, a crank all mixed up in the thing I have to do . . . He must be telling the truth. No one could invent such a fantastic story . . .

'But where did Minovsky get the tubes?'

'That's what we'd all like to know.'

'You're sure he didn't invent them?'

'He couldn't! I told you the man can't drive a straight nail. Someone gave them to him, and I figured that someone must be you.'

'The name's faintly familiar.'

'Then you *do* know him?'

'Where did you say he lives?'

'California, atop Mount Ramolap.'

. . . Mount Ramolap . . . Remember that . . . Important . . .

'Why anyone should bring him into it beats me.—Are you sure you didn't?'

. . . Not sure of anything . . . could have done . . . don't know . . .

'Because, if you did, it was the darn stupidest thing a guy could do.'

'And if I didn't?'

'If ~~you~~ didn't, we've got to find out who did and where he got them.'

'Should I go and see him, find out, make sure?'

'Yeah— --you could do that. But I'd much rather you sat down and prepared me that blueprint.'

'I'll need to see Minovsky first.' . . . Yes play for time . . . play for time . . . anything . . .

'He's a tricky customer.'

... Maybe he is ... but he may know something ...

'I'll have to think over your offer. It's too big to be rushed.'

'There isn't all the time in the world.'

'I must have some time. There's more to this than you know.'

'Such as what?'

'Will you give me till the end of the week?'

He is about to begin a new tirade when he checks himself, becoming quiet and paternal. 'All right, boy. You take a few days to think it over. Convince yourself you're doing right to play with us. But believe me, any other people you may have in mind won't be able to touch our offer.'

'I wasn't thinking of other offers.'

'Doesn't matter; doesn't matter.' His voice is so gentle: 'You see, we always get what we want—one way or another.'

Back to my hotel room and think ... Widlow is not the man ... not the one I came to see ... another bad surprise, another type of human being ... a ruthless man pretending to be kind, so he can get what he wants without trouble ... Trouble if he doesn't get it. ...

I go down to the lobby to an airline desk.

'How long does it take to get to California?'

'About eleven hours.'

'I'd like to go today' ... and to get away from New York, away from Widlow and the mounting suspicions ... If Widlow did what I think he did, I can't get far enough away from him ...

'What part of California, sir?'

'Mount Ramolap. Ever hear of it?'

The girl considers: 'Well, the quickest way would be to go to Los Angeles and drive from there. It's about a hundred miles away.'

'And how far's Los Angeles from New York?'

'Nearly three thousand miles.'

'But that's as far as I've come from England.'

... For that matter, may as well go back to England and start looking there. ... 'Only eleven hours, did you say?'

'By plane.'

'Oh, yes, by plane. Of course.'

'We can book you on a flight at five-thirty from Idlewild.'

'Are these planes safe?'

She laughs at that. She thinks it rather funny.

'Well, you could go by horse and buggy — or covered wagon.'

'May as well go then.'

... May be Van Ellb and Minovsky will lead me to the thing I have to do before Widlow finds out ... Widlow ...

... There's more to this than a fuel saver ... The thing I've come to do is bigger than Widlow ... bigger than Global ... bigger than all the oil companies put together ... It's going to change the world. ... It's going to ... Careful! Mustn't think like this! ... that feeling of going-up ... of suddenly getting larger than the world ... stop it ... it's dangerous. It's only a result of getting knocked on the head. ...

I pay my bill and a boy puts my new bag in a waiting car, a large black car full of buttons — —

'Ready to make the plane, Mr Lutterworth, sir?'

'I think there's some mistake; this is Mr Widlow's car.'

'Mr Widlow wants me to drive you to the airport.'

Man gets out and opens the door for me.

'Going to L.A.?—Nice city. You'll like it there. If you see Mrs Van Elb, Mr Widlow says to pay her his best respects.'

Before I can protest he has pushed me gently inside and got in beside me. 'Mr Widlow says you're to stay at the Statler in the Global Suite. Everything's on the company.'

'Would it be too much to ask if Mr Widlow knows all my plans?'

The man considers this for a long time.

'Reckon it could be.'

His complacency makes me angry. 'And suppose I don't like the Statler?'

'Mr Widlow'd be very disappointed if you didn't, wouldn't he, Abe?'

The driver nods: 'He sure would be! He sure hates being disappointed.'

At the airport Abe and his friend accompany me to a sign which says that no visitors are allowed beyond this point. They nod to the guard and walk straight on past the sign, out on to a large stretch of concrete, out to the waiting plane. They remain at the bottom of the steps and stand there while I find my hat. Through a window I can see them watching me, till a sudden noise makes the plane shiver . . . Huge whirling things . . . smoke . . . vibration . . . something wrong . . . moment of panic . . .

But everyone else is calm, quiet in their seats, reading, talking . . .

. It's all right . . . This noise is just part of it. These flying machines make this noise . . . you should know that.

'Fasten your belt please, sir, we're about to take off—Here, let me show you--That's it.' The girl in blue

smiles at me like a solicitous aunt smiling at a backward child. 'Is this your first flight?'

'I suppose it is.'

'There's nothing to be afraid of. Just sit back and enjoy yourself. Ring this bell if you want anything.'

. . . Gathering speed now . . . extraordinary pushing sensation in my back . . . faster, faster . . . the concrete a rushing blur of white . . . the seat pressing harder . . . a sudden lift . . . and climbing away . . . climbing, climbing . . . less noise now . . .

. . . Beginning to remember the principle. Those whirling things. They are angled to produce an air pressure in the opposite direction . . . By reaction of forces this draws the plane forward until the air flowing over and under the wings is sufficient to lift it . . . What an extraordinary and inefficient way of going about it!

'Interesting, isn't it, sir?'

'Very.'

'Fine view of Manhattan coming up.'

Down through the window, the crowded towers and crushed fingers of the island city . . . So it's on an island . . . didn't realise that before . . . Long lean spikes, squat white slabs . . . some almost beautiful. . . .

But one tower unlike the rest . . . a gleaming blue slab rising by the waterside . . . a blue glass slab set in lawn and white stone. . . . Something about that tower is suddenly familiar and important. . . .

Then the plane turns, and it is gone.

I turn to inspect my fellow travellers. Some are reading, others dozing, others doing nothing at all. They know all about the wonders of this upper world. The white crags and serrated cloud palaces leave them uninterested and cold. They have flown before. They are blasé.

5

SOME hours later we prepare to land.

'Los Angeles already?'

The girl in blue smiles at my stupidity. 'No, sir. This is Chicago! Next stop Kansas City. We get to L.A. at eleven-thirty Pacific Time.'

... so this plane stops on the way? ... Hadn't thought of that.

Has Willow thought of it?

He'll have someone waiting for me at Los Angeles; that goes without saying, but what about Chicago? Let's try and find out...

When we land, I leave the plane and walk around the airport as if to stretch my legs, keeping a sharp lookout. When they call for us to board the plane I wait till the last possible moment so that anyone following me would be tempted to act. But nothing happens. If I am watched, it is done most skilfully.

At Kansas City it is different. Not such a large place as Chicago. Unlikely to find anyone here... very unlikely... So when the passengers get out, I go with them and do not return. Instead, I take a job and drive around the city. After some time I make a new reservation from a ticket office in a large hotel.

'And what name, sir?'

... The planes carry lists of all passengers... Saw the girl ticking them off as we got in, so I say:

'Jones—Herbert Jones.'

'Thank you, Mr Jones—' That sing-song voice they always use—'Your plane leaves at twenty-two hundred—'

'When?'

'Ten o'clock. Limousine service departs from this hotel fifty minutes before flight time. Enjoy your trip.'

The new plane is almost filled when I arrive, but I am able to find a seat by a window. A moment later the seat beside me is taken by a young man with short fair hair, and clear grey eyes set wide apart in a pleasant round face. He asks if I mind him sitting by me. I say 'No, I'd be delighted'. I like his voice . . . Voices are very important . . . I'm going a lot by voices. The way they are pitched gives clues to the type of personality. This man is different again to those I have met so far. He doesn't belong to the Widlow type, nor the hotel clerk, nor the taxi driver, nor any of the types I met on the ship. He interests me and I want to hear him speak again.

'My name's Herbert Jones', I tell him.

'Mine's Warren Radley. Glad to meet you, Mr Jones. Going to Los Angeles?'

. . . I'm right . . . it's a good voice . . . low and well pitched . . . an even voice . . . an even character . . . He's not trying to hide something. I like him.

'Do you live in California, Mr Radley?'

He does.

He works there.

He's been away on business, and at the moment he can hardly wait to get back home to Los Angeles where a young and, apparently, incredibly lovely wife eagerly awaits him. He has never been away from her since their marriage six months ago, and the quicker this plane can run him home the more pleased he will be.

. . . I feel sympathy with him . . . You might call it an immediate attunement. so that while he talks I have a mental picture of a girl like a flame, a tall girl with flaming hair, white skin and green-grey eyes in a face like a delicate version of his own. He is very happy with her,

and this feeling that they are happy makes me feel slightly less strange and alone.

He tells me he has been staying with his wife's mother on Long Island. His wife, Selina, was a New Yorker; they met two years ago at a Convention (whatever that is); took one look at each other, and literally tumbled into each other's arms and a suitable contract to make it respectable.

'Funny how you can do that, isn't it?' he asks me: 'I'd never seen the girl before, nor she me, but she just got up and left the beau she was with, and I ditched my party and we weren't seen again till we came back from our honeymoon.'

'I don't think it's at all strange. It should always be like that.'

'What brings you to California, Mr Jones?'

'I'm in engineer and there's someone there I have to see.'

'Well, what do you know? I'm in electronics. Perhaps I could give you some introductions.'

'I'll take you up on that.'

'Do that—I was a Sabre pilot in the Korean War. But I'm glad I'm out of the Air Force. My brother-in-law, Bob Whitting—that's Selina's brother—he's flying with the Navy at San Diego. At the moment he's spending a furlough with us in Los Angeles.'

... Korean War? ... echo there somewhere ... Has to do with the thing I have to do ... Mustn't betray my ignorance ... Let him talk ... Find out things ...

But he starts about transistor development, and I find there is nothing in his line of research that would resemble my little pieces of 'costume jewellery'.

... Trust him ... you can trust him ... This is the first man you've met who you can trust ...

... This isn't an emotion . . . don't *feel* a thing . . . something cold and detached and inviolable says: Trust him, he is safe; he is a friend.

And do I need a friend!

To my delight, he says suddenly:

'I'd like for you to visit us and meet my wife, if you're not too tied up?'

'Thank you, Warren. I should like that very much.'

'We've gotten a little place up in the Canyons; just above the smog level. I told Selma if we were going to have kids, I wasn't going to raise them down in that poisonous smog of Los Angeles.'

'What's smog?'

He laughs.

'Brother, what is smog? You'll see quick enough! Hell, if they don't solve the problem soon Los Angeles will have to be abandoned in the next twenty years; everyone's lungs will rot--and to think ten years back it was a blue-skied paradise!'

... Maybe that's what my 'jewels' will do, produce vapourless combustion, save thousands of people from rotting lungs . . .

Ten or twenty years, Mr Lutterworth . . . You leave it all to Global!

'Where are you staying, Mr Jones?'

'I had thought of the Statler, but I'm not so sure now.'

'We've a spare room, if you wouldn't mind being out in the Canyons.'

'From what you tell me, it sounds ideal. But I can't just impose upon you like that.'

'It would be a pleasure and a privilege. You people were good to me when I was in Europe. I'd like very much for you to stay with us.'

... Stay with him ... you'll be safe there ... no one will know ... and Widlow won't be able to keep you watched ...

'Well—many thanks!'

That's America for you; full of surprises—some of them very pleasant.

Dinner arrives—a highly efficient dinner, each course in a mathematically-calculated compartment of an efficient plastic tray.

Night descends. The cabin lights are switched out. I doze fitfully.

I awake to find Warren leaning over me, his face glued to my window.

'Take a look at those things!'

He makes room for my face at the port-hole and points to a straggling formation of vivid orange-coloured objects some distance below us. The ground is invisible, but these objects appear to be moving slowly in an opposite direction.

'What are they?'

'I don't know ... I'll ask.'

He rings for the hostess and draws her attention to them. She looks at them puzzled for a few minutes and says: 'I'll go and ask the Captain.'

The objects maintain their relative positions but are now moving behind and away from us.

'Eight all together', says Warren. 'I wish I hadn't packed my camera; I've a telephoto lens.'

'Could they be aircraft?'

'Those aren't jets. Besides, they're going too slowly. If only we could see the ground! and get an estimation.'

The girl returns shortly and bends over us so she can be heard.

'Captain says he can see them quite plainly and they're

oil wells—Sometimes they burn off excess gas for safety and it makes that bright flame.'

'But they're moving', says Warren.

'No, they're actually on the ground. Look!'

The moon comes out from behind a high cloud layer and for the first time we catch sight of the wild desolate terrain some few miles below us. Watching carefully I can see the tiny outline of derricks and towers, faintly grey in the moonlight.

'Yeah, guess I was mistaken', says Warren. 'You can see the derricks now. Those are only oil gas flames. Well, what do you know! It just shows how careful you have to be. Even pilots can be mistaken.'

'Well, what did you think they were?'

'I reckoned they might be flying saucers.'

The girl laughs: 'One of our ships sighted some on this run last week: two of them going fast over Grand Canyon.'

'Did they now?' Warren is interested. 'Well, I'll tell you; I was in Korea during that truce. I saw the big one that patrolled up and down the lines. For three whole days it came and went—up and down, up and down. We could almost set our watches by it.'

'It must have been a blimp', says the girl.

'That was no blimp. It looked more like a big, round, silver cloud; fuzzy at the edges, and the inside seemed to be whirling.'

'Captain says those sort of things are meteorological phenomena. All our pilots are briefed on them so they won't go putting in reports and getting the airline the wrong kind of publicity.'

'Listen, honey', says Warren: 'That thing in Korea was nothing meteorological.'

'Oh, we get reports like that all the time.'

'There's more going on than meets the eye. My—er—a pilot I know has just been on a two weeks' course—"UFO Identification" it was called. It's secret and we're not meant to talk about it. But you're not going to tell me the Government would waste time like that over nothing.'

'Our pilots do that also.'

'It's not the same, honey. The classifications this pilot was given are not meteorological. He had to work on models and photographs. The classifications ran like this—"Disk, Type One, two, three; Cigar Type, one, two, three and four; Scout Ship Type, parent craft." Those photos made his eyes pop. Why, one of these things had twelve decks of portholes!'

The girl's eyes widened: 'You don't say!'

'Who took the photos?' I ask.

'Various sources, mainly aircraft.'

'Well, what are they then?'

'That's what we'd all like to know.'

And, after the girl has gone, he admits: 'That pilot was my brother-in-law, but don't say I said so or he'll get into trouble.'

'Why?'

'It's secret.'

'Oh!'

'Of course, most of them can be explained away. But they say one thing to the people, and another to the pilots', says Warren. 'Those in the know have a pretty good idea where they come from, but they remember the panic when Orson Welles did "An Invasion from Mars" broadcast back in the "thirties", so they discourage reports in the papers.'

Thinking of Widlow I remark: 'And there'd be a slump on Wall Street.'

'Yes, I reckon there would be. Why, the President^d only has to sneeze for the market to shiver. An invasion from space would set off a selling rush like twenty-nine. Say, how about some coffee?'

6

WARREN is met at Los Angeles airport.

Something white flashes across the concrete and leaps into his arms, obscuring his face in a cloud of flame-coloured hair. I pick up the bag he dropped and wait in the shadows, contented to watch unobtrusively. Somehow I cannot help myself; the sight of two people happy in each other, blissful in the moment of re-union to which both have counted the hours, is the most enjoyable experience I've had. I feel that when someone touches the heights the whole human race shares a little in his happiness, likewise, when someone suffers, every living being saddens a little. It may not be so, but it should be. Why that is I do not know.

So when they finally unwind themselves and Warren presents me to his Selma, I feel we have already embraced and become old friends. Only one small cloud comes between us; he has been away from home and the presence of a stranger in the house would be unwelcome.

'Nonsense!' says Selma, pushing a streak of red hair from her face: 'My brother, Bob, is here on a few days'

furlough, and if you don't mind a tiny room, you'd be welcome. 'In fact', she adds with a grin, for which Warren rebukes her: 'Four may be better than three. You can amuse Bob if Warren and I seem rather scarce at times.'

'Selina!— really!'

'Come on then, boys. Let's pile into the convertible and go.'

I sit in the back as we race through that vast and endless suburb known as Metropolitan Los Angeles. I observe that one third of the city is composed of used car lots, one third of real estate offices, and the remaining third of telegraph poles and power pylons.

The blaring posters on the various cars for sale are worrily of note—nothing restrained, like 'Bargain at \$500', but screaming banners, such as 'A Steal', 'Suicide Price', and on one dubious looking hunk of chrome the simple placard, in letters two feet high 'Wow!'

After many miles of this kind of thing (a highlight was the neon sign 'Church of Saint Michael Air-conditioned' . . . a Jet-Age saint one wonders) we come into the Freeway, which is a breathtaking piece of engineering. In the centre of town we cross what Warren calls a four-level overpass, where four freeways cross at different levels, connected to one another by curving wings of concrete on white spidery pylons. We head up the Hollywood Freeway and soon turn off into the Canyons, precipitous, miniature mountains with houses chiselled into the sides. We take a winding, bumpy road and climb steeply, coming out at last on a tiny plateau balancing three houses on its summit. The last of these, built in a pleasant style of white timber, is numbered 12,304. And lest that seem too awe-inspiring the Radleys have renamed it 'The Lookout'.

'Look at it: just look at it', says Warren as we leave the car. 'Look at that view! Mr Jones, you're in luck tonight. It's not often the air's so good.'

From horizon to horizon as far as the eye can see, lies a great open jewel box. The forty-mile width of Los Angeles sprawls below us, a million gold, red and blue twinkling precious stones.

'Come on, Mr Jones, I've some food in the lounge. I'll bet you're starving.'

But as I step over the threshold I hesitate. An invisible blow in the back of my head . . . a sudden cold wind, a chill of apprehension . . . Go back . . . go back . . . don't enter here . . .

'Come on in.'

. . . Sudden sense of brooding evil . . . something I can't understand . . . I want to run before it is too late . . .

. . . Disappointment, pain in Selma Radley's eyes . . . She thinks I don't like it that it's not good enough for me . . . I hurt . . . she'll be dreadfully hurt if I leave now. Should have thought of it earlier . . . should have kept to original plans and stayed at the Statler . . .

'This is nothing like the Statler, I'm afraid', says Warren as if picking up my thoughts, the beginning of coldness in his voice.

'I'm sorry, Warren. I was thinking of something entirely different. You have a lovely home, but I feel I'm a terrible imposition on you.'

'Hell, no! I thought we'd been through all that?'

'I had a sudden feeling it might hurt you if I stayed here.'

'You'll hurt us if you don't', says Selma, giving me a vigorous push that sends me into the living room.

. . . Inside now . . . Too late to turn back . . . Then there's nothing for it but to stay and to hope . . .

... May every blessing be upon this house. Preserve it from all harm. Peace to these people . . . Always! . . .

Selina throws off her white leather coat.

'Bob's run down to catch the late show at Grauman's Chinese. Sally couldn't make it tonight so he'll be back soon. That's my kid brother, the one we hope you'll like. He'll be glad to drive you around while you're here. If you want to see one of the studios, Sally Richards—that's his girl friend—is secretary to Mr Kreutzgeld, and she'd be happy to arrange a tour: not the ordinary tour but the real red-carpet job they hand out to important visitors.'

'Studio tours come in several grades', says Warren. 'For the sixty-four dollar tour you're allowed to kiss Marilyn Monroe.'

'Who is Marilyn Monroe?'

I might have said I was about to rob the City Bank or take a shot at the President. such is the reaction. Warren and Selina look at me as if I had just escaped from a zoo.

'You honestly mean—you—don't—KNOW?'

The secret's out.

'I'm afraid I shall have to make a confession. I haven't told Warren, but I should have. I'm just about the fanciest case of amnesia you're ever likely to encounter. I had a crack on the head last week and forgot everything: even my name. My total life, you might say, began a mere seven days ago. Apart from bits and pieces I've re-learned, I'm only a week old—I think I'd better go to the Statler after all.'

'You don't!' shrieks Selina, after taking in the situation: 'Why, you're just perfect! You'll be the perfectest visitor we've ever had. Warren, imagine it: a guest who knows nothing about anything. Why, every darn corny thing we show him will be a treat.'

She comes over and kisses me on the forehead.

'Sweetie, this is going to be the hugest fun we've ever had!'

'Look at the maternal instinct bustin' out all over', taunts Warren. 'John, you'd better watch out for yourself. This gorgeous gal likes nothing better than the weak and helpless. Bet you she'll run down town at dawn and buy you a pram!'

'Beast!'

A little later her brother Bob comes in. And later, but not much later, Bob and I are alone. I was touched by the tactful way they withdrew, leaving me with Bob, and I'm glad my presence in their house no longer delays their joy. I'm glad, very glad, to have met these three friends . . . yes, friends from the outset, friends I know I can trust . . . It would be so easy to tell them my story and ask their help, but I've no right to involve them in unknown dangers . . . That warning feeling, that same alertness that told me Widlow was dangerous the moment I touched his hand, now tells me not to drag these people into something I must do alone . . . Again that cold feeling I had on entering the house . . . even as I'm talking to Bob it fills the room . . . cold . . . merciless . . . evil in the worst sense . . . efficiently evil . . . It centres not on me but on Bob. Yet it is coming from me. It is trying to hurt Bob through me . . .

'Guess it's about time to turn in', says Bob, suddenly depressed.

'Yes, I suppose it is.'

But no sleep comes.

Tossing and turning on currents of restless thought; sometimes dropping off into a half-doze, awaking with a cry as I seem to be sinking into a grey pit. The ceiling above assumes fantastic faces and slow, creeping forms. A

bright shaft, a long metal dagger is posed over my head, a great hairy hand flexing cruel fingers to strike. Frozen, horrified, I watch it—unable to cry out. Suddenly it moves and becomes the shaft of light from a car head-lamp creeping up the canyon.

Voices—later. Voices murmuring a slow lament. Lamenting in a forgotten tongue. But the dirge they chant is of catastrophe and death.

Voices again, this time gentle and far away. Far off voices trying to reach me, to warn me, to tell me what I must do. But they fade away when I try to hear them.

On the cold streaks of dawn I slide into oblivion, where I meet someone. Someone who is nearer to me than myself. But she cannot see me. I can see her, but she cannot see me for there is a veil of forgetfulness between us. She waits me to speak to her, to reveal myself, but I cannot. She is gone.

.

'Hello, sleepy!'

It's Bob standing by my bed holding a pot of steaming coffee.

'How'd you sleep?'

'Not too well. What time is it?'

'Quarter after ten. Sis and Warren have gone over to Pasadena. They have gone to see a guy there about Warren's new job. It's twice the pay he gets from Unelco.—Now that they plan to start a family—'

'Time I got up.'

'Is there anywhere you'd care to visit? I've got a jalopy and I'd be happy to drive you around.'

'Yes, I would. There's two people I particularly want to see, but I don't know where they live.'

'We could look in the directory.'

'One's called Minovsky, the other's a Mrs. Emerald Van Elb; she has a temple or something. I don't suppose they'd mean a thing to you?'

Bob laughs. 'Van Elb? Not the—hey, wait a minute; not that temple in the desert, the Temple of All-Caressing Light, I think it's called.'

'Know it?'

'Everyone's heard of it.'

'Have you been there?'

'Who, me?' He shakes his head. 'But I'd be happy to take you if you want to go. I've often thought of giving the place the once over, but somehow never gotten around to it. Say, you're not a spiritualist, are you?'

'No.'

'Didn't think you were.—You know, this Van Elb's a fabulous character and no kidding. Made herself a fortune, too. This is Sucker State. Heck, if I was smart I'd set myself up as a prophet with a beard and a Cadillac and I'd have all the rich neurotics coming to me for salvation. From what I hear she's got six mink coats and a hundred thousand followers. Makes you sick.'

'Don't judge her without seeing her. For all we know she may have helped a lot of people. Let's see her first, eh?'

'Sure thing. Anything for a laugh.'

Bob's car may look ramshackle, but appearances can be deceptive. Bob explains it's got a Lincoln engine, and that he built most of the car himself. It's what he calls a 'not-rod'. There is much noise, much acceleration and amazing, not to say alarming, feats of roadmanship. Bob spurts away from the restricted areas and we are soon out in the desert: a brown and buff plain with chocolate and coffee mountains; a breath-takingly lovely study in shades of brown. Away on a small rise I can see something white shimmering through the heat haze.

As we come nearer it turns into a white dome, set in a small oasis of jewel-green grass and waving cypress. Rainbows from a hundred tiny water jets sparkle on the lawns, white statues gleam occasionally in the groves and in the centre, a dazzling white dome is repeated in a lake more blue than the sky. Against the desert brown it is a fantastic mirage, a vision of paradise for a thirsty traveller lost in the wastes. Bob gives a loud whistle. 'Must hand it to her. It sure is beautiful.'

We are signalled to a park where several other cars and a motor-coach are drawn up behind a discreet screen of trees.

A guard greets us with a fulsome smile.

'Welcome, brothers. Hurry right across the bridge and you'll be in time to join the tour. The Angel will receive you at the Gates.'

We cross a small bridge as directed, coming to an immense pair of green bronze doors embossed with five-pointed stars and other curiously familiar symbols.

'What now, Herbert? How do we get into this Shangri-la?'

For answer the doors swing open and a soft voice calls: 'Enter, friends.'

In the sudden gloom of a high, cool hall we find ourselves the object of many eyes—tourist eyes, a crowd with cameras and passive, cautious faces.

Again the soft voice: 'Welcome, friends, you are just in time for a tour of our beautiful temple.' The voice I now see comes from a tall handsome girl whose golden hair hangs to the waist of her white filmy robe.

'Some Angel!' whispers Bob. 'If this is holiness, count me in.'

The girl greets us with a beatific Hollywood smile and begins to recite the history of the temple. Her sandalled feet move silently over the mosaic floor, the crowd

follows, gaping and respectful. I cannot help admiring the building. Whoever designed it had taste and understood the beauty of stone—great plain blocks of stone carefully fitted, without mortar. It reminds me of something in the past, something I might once have known; only then there were no tourists, and people did not chew gum.

But Bob is no longer with me. He is more interested in the 'Angel' than the architecture.

The tour ends.

'We were happy to have you with us, dear friends. We hope you will come again. Whenever you are weary, sad and tired there is always refreshment to be found in the Garden of Contemplation and in these happy halls.—And now, I am sure you will all wish to express your appreciation by making the usual voluntary gift of one dollar which you may place in the silver boxes on either side of the entrance doors. Thank you. It was a privilege to be your guide.'

Bob stays with the 'Angel'.

'We sure enjoyed that, Miss Hyacinth.'

... So he's learned her name already.

'This is my friend, Herb Jones from England.'

'Happy to meet you, Brother Jones.' A cool, angelic hand is graciously extended.

'Happy to meet you—ci—Angel.'

'Oh, just call me Busty, like when I was in Burlesque.'

'Busty, do you think we could see Miss Van Elb?'

A furrrough wrinkles the beatific brow: Trouble is she has the Circle in ten minutes, and then she's going to San Francisco for the Convention right after.'

'If I could only see her for ten minutes—It's very important.'

She considers.

'Unless you was to attend the Circle. Have you ever been to a seance before?'

'Gee, I'd be scared', says Bob.

'Have you, Herb?'

'I don't think so. But we'll promise to do what we're told.'

'We don't usually take folks without experience; but you seem nice reverent boys. I knew you was reverent, Bob, the way you been looking at me.'

'Please, Busty, see if you can get us in.'

'O.K., Herb, I'll go and ask if you could join today's Seances, there's only about a dozen on my list, so there'll be room enough. You wait right here and I'll go fix it.'

A block of stone swings outwards at her touch. At this hidden entrance she turns and radiates at Bob. 'Don't you all go away now.'

. . . This may be better than a private interview. Widow's bound to have warned her I'm coming. But this way I can sit in the crowd, ask questions, perhaps learn something vital.

'Know something, Herb? I reckon it's about time I got religion.'

'What will Silly say?'

He punches my shoulder playfully: 'You big bum!'

In time, soft-sandalled foot-eps return, and Busty informs us we may attend the seance. 'I'm real happy for you. You're going to have a great experience. The usual gift is ten dollars each—more if the spirit moves you.'

'This is on me, Bob. Would thirty dollars do us both?'

'It sure would. Brother, I knew you were something special the moment I saw you. I picked you out from all that crowd of cecops and I said "Busty", I said, "these folks is ethical"—'.

Still prattling, she leads us down a corridor, her

diaphanous robe swinging with renewed vigour.

A short flight of curved steps and we are in a large, windowless chamber roofed by a high dome. Soft uniform light, warm and friendly. Twelve seats grouped in two semi-circles. Between them a raised dais and an elaborate throne carved of strange winged animals. Busty leads us to a group of chairs in a roped-off enclosure where about a dozen people are already seated.

'Come, brothers, sit here with the other seekers.' Her official angelic voice is now back in action. 'Rest and be still. I shall be with you throughout; so fear not!'

'You didn't have to do that. We could have taken Busty to the canteen afterwards', Bob whispers.

'I want to see the prophetess in action, and I want to see her without her seeing me.'

'Hope you'll find it worth thirty bucks.'

'I hope so, too.'

... Little you know how much! ... Little you know what may happen to me if I don't find out something soon ... by any means ... yes, even through a medium if necessary. Haven't much choice, have I? Only she and this Minovsky person and myself have held the crystals. So watch her carefully when she comes. Watch for any sign that will give a lead. She had the crystals and she knows something about them.

A stir, a shuffle. The Circle file in; pale, shy individuals; uninspiring and uninspired; dull their lives, dull and unimportant till all this came along ... nine ... ten ... eleven ... one missing ... one chair empty ...

Empty chair—only eleven. This should tell me something, something important ... Remember it! ... Remember the empty chair! ...

Why?

... Heaven knows! But note it and remember!

Sudden hush; respectful, expectant. 'Presence' is upon us.

She's exactly as I imagined: huge, dominating woman, magnificent green robes, diamond-lights glinting on chubby fingers, a colossal emerald clanking at her breast, clanking in golden filigree—a curious pointed star, like the one on the gates, like . . . like another I saw recently, very recently, but where. . . . Where?

Utter silence. Commanding eyes sweep the gathering; stately ascent of the throne; her tuning is perfect.

When the matriarch looks us over, one at a time . . . I hide my face as if in deep meditation. Widow may have sent her a description, even a photo.

Now she is looking my way. Can actually feel the power of her gaze alight on me, questioning—curious, asking who I am. She's trying to penetrate my mind, and I believe she could do it if I let her . . . Must stop her . . . Quickly . . . think of something irrelevant . . . the States . . .

California, New Mexico, Arkansas, Missouri, Ohio . . .
don't know any more . . . *California, New Mexico,*
Arkansas, Missouri —Missouri—

She's moved on . . .

Now she is about to speak . . . Eager, hopeful faces . . .
A slight pause to increase tension then—

'Brothers and Sisters—' Curiously high voice for so large a woman: 'Once more we are privileged to gather together at this chosen hour and pierce the veils of illusion. Once more we are privileged to have with us pilgrims who have made the crossing of the great desert to be with us in our Sanctuary. We bid you welcome.' Her eyes catch mine.

California, New Mexico, Arkansas, Ohio . . .

'Do not tense yourself, good friends; relax and be at

one with us. Relax——Be still——Be——v-ery——still.'

Imperceptibly at first the music starts. Hidden amplifiers high in the dome, gentle choirs, the clear bell-like voices of young boys, and the light fading to heighten the atmosphere of mystery and soothing peace.

'Now we are one and we are still——very still. Through the beauty of sound we are joined.——Still——Peace.'

It is splendidly staged . . . Easy to be carried away . . . to relax vigilance . . . Watch! Watch carefully . . .

'Soon I shall leave this place. I shall be carried away in sleep, and my Guides will take over my body that they may be with you. Then you may speak to them freely and as you will. But first, while I am still with you, I shall give clairvoyance as is our custom.'

Coming after the dramatic entry and the carefully prepared music this has the air of a minor revelation. The 'Seekers' are fully appreciative.

'I sense two among us who are strangers to these arts. They are doubly welcome. This day may well mark the beginnings of great things for them, things beyond expectation.'

Not very hard! She knows about us from Hyacinth . . .

'Come, young friend; what is it you come to seek?'

Slightly embarrassed, Bob replies: 'I—I don't quite know, I guess.'

'You have come to seek the Truth.' She pronounces it 'tr, terooth'.

'I suppose so.'

Admiring stir from the seekers.

'Your first time with us?'

'Yes, but Busty here, I mean the angel said it was O.K.'

'Angel Hyacinth did well to lead you to us.'

A man gets up.

'Could I ask something?—Could you tell me if I should sell the house on Sunset?'

A pause.

'No, brother. I feel you should wait two months. Be patient a little longer, for I see a man with a cigar and a blue car making you a much better offer.'

The man is amazed. 'But that's Ed Weinberger. He has a blue Cadillac and always smokes Websters—Weinberger the realtor—Say, this is pretty good.'

... Yes, it's good, if it's genuine, very good indeed.

'Thank you, Madam. Thank you very much. I'm truly glad I came.'

A minute gracious nod acknowledges his thanks. Then her pale grey eyes descend on Bob.

'O.K., Buster', he murmurs: 'Here goes for the sixty-four dollar question. Let's get our money's worth.'

Gangling to his feet he scratches his head.

'I—er,——well, it's about a girl.'

He receives a nod of encouragement.

'Well, the thing is I love Sally and she says she loves me, but she has me all mixed up. One day she figgers she'll marry me, the next day she says I'm too young and she's not sure—Screwy kid!'

'She has short golden hair?'

'Yeah, real pretty. She has class, too. That's what I like in her.'

'I see her working in a very large building.'

'In the studios. That's correct.'

... Not very difficult ... Most girls in Los Angeles work in large buildings ...

'It isn't that she doesn't love you; she does. But—the matriarchal smile drains away. For a moment she seems at a loss for words—'I—I find it very hard to answer this type of question. It's not always easy to see

clearly—so many factors—different possibilities—’.

‘Oh, please try and help. You said you would. I’ve got to know about this kid. She’s driving me around the bend.’

‘I’d rather not. I try to avoid personal questions.’

‘But we paid thirty bucks.’

‘It was a gift, and you may take it back if you wish.’

... Stir among the Circle ... uneasy ... worried ...
Bob has upset her ... They’re not used to seeing her upset ...

Determined to get his money’s worth, Bob persists: ‘But you *did* say she loves me?’

‘Yes.’

‘Then what’s to prevent it? I mean her divorce was absolute last month.’

She recovers her composure and speaks rapidly: ‘So many things have to be considered. When personal motions are involved, everything may seem straightforward and favourable to the persons concerned. Then a whim, a sudden change of emotion may cause conditions to manifest which could not be foreseen—’. She waves her hand across her head as though brushing something away ... ‘Too much power in this room. Something is interfering with my vibrations—’. Then she looks Bob straight in the eye. ‘All I can say to you, young man, is this—be very careful of accidents in the immediate future. If you drive an auto, drive with caution. If you have enemies, take care to avoid them. I’m afraid that is all I can tell you. Next question, please.’

Bob resumes his seat and whispers to me: ‘Why’s she stalling like that?’

... I don’t think she’s stalling. She appeared to see something she didn’t want to tell.

Suddenly, after answering several questions from the

'Seekers' she throws up her hands.

'It's no use, dear friends. There is interference here today. I don't know where it's coming from—Everything is blocked—confused. I shall have to leave you and allow the guides to take over. I shall go into trance.'

A flash from a jewelled ring as one of her fingers makes a tiny movement, pressing a button in the arm of her chair. A signal for softly the choirs begin again. Deeper music this time, solemn and apprehensive . . . Lights fading, slowly fading—only a single red light coming from a blood-ruby star high in the dome . . . choirs fading . . . silence . . .

Groans from Mrs Van Flb . . . Groans and curious writhings

'Can't—• can't get through—-Forces—-'

Then mother long silence. Once more the music starts. Mrs Van Flb slumps forward in an impressive pose of anguish . . . Music fades . . .

More groaning . . . then a man's voice, a deep voice, quite different to her own . . . 'Cannot come—cannot come through—evil—ones—evil ones here—Cannot come—' An agonised gasp 'Cannot come through—' . . .

Whispering in the Circle

—Too much power—flaming wail—burning, burning, burning now *Lights!*

The scream stutters everyone

'Lights!—Lights!' Her normal voice

The lights come on suddenly, startling white light making us blink.

Wide-eyed and frightened she glares at us—a terrified, fanatical glare.

'You—you stopped them.' She is pointing at me.

Accusing finger—accusing white face. 'You, you stopped them coming through—You stopped them, and you bring death—death!'

'C'mon, Herb, let's get out of this nut-house.'

'Hold it, Bob.' I rise slowly, waiting for silence.

'Why do you say these things?'

'You almost fooled me, but you cannot fool my Guides.'

'Why am I evil? What have I done? Why do you speak such things?'

'Well might you ask! It has never happened before, has it?' She looks around for affirmation from her supporters.

'No, Master: it hasn't.'

'Your force was so strong it stopped my trance. As soon as I began to go I felt it, all around you, like a blazing wall—a wall of fire—burning and all around you. Ha! You cannot fool us. We know where you come from. Back! Back, Brothers and Sisters! Back! They are Dark Ones in disguise.'

Consternation from the disciples.

'Don't know about you, Herb, but I'd feel much less of a dark one if we could get out into the fresh air.'

... What did she see? Is it me, or something around me? ... I have to know ...

'Madam, don't be hysterical. Tell me what you see. I wish to know.'

'You know—you know only too well.' She peers at me with those glaring grey eyes, and slowly shakes her head. 'No, you do not know. You know nothing. You are hypnotised—a walking shell—a wandering sleepless, mindless vortex of evil—'. Drawing a sign in the air she cries: 'Out! Begone from our midst! Out, by the power you cannot defy!'

'Amen!' murmur the disciples.
 'Let's go, Herb. I'm scared.'

.

Sunlight and the bridge across the lake.

'Don't run, Bob: the guard may suspect trouble.'

'They'll phone him.'

'I don't think so! They're only too glad to be rid of us.'

When we are in the car and the temple is receding into a white shimmer, Bob gives a sigh: 'Anyway', he says, 'that angel was something.'

A little later he says: 'Cheer up, Herb! Don't let that witch fascinate you.'

'I wonder what she saw.'

'Nothing! It was all part of the act. Gave them a thrill and cost you thirty bucks.'

'But, Bob----Suppose I am evil?'

'You!' His laugh is the most reassuring thing. 'If you're evil, then I'm the old man with horns.'

'Who's he?'

'For crying out loud! You're not going to believe a word she says! I tell you the dame is a screwball.'

'—If it weren't for that one thing.'

'What thing?'

'Last night—last night before you arrived, and later after you'd come home, I felt something all around us—frightening—evil.'

'Now don't you start, or you'll give me the willies, too.'

'If I only knew what it was——imagination, something in me, or something following me. . .'

'Talking of following, Herb; get a look behind you.'

'That car?—It pulled out just as we left the temple.'

'It's following all right; stalking us just like a cop car.'

But it's no cop car. They don't have them that fancy colour.—So what! The witches' coven doesn't scare me!

'It's not from Mrs Van Elb.'

'Then who——?'

... Widlow's men ... missed me at the airport ... been waiting for me at the Temple ... Bound to happen.

'I think there's two men aboard. One's wearing a white hat by the look of it.'

Bob swings round for another look.

'Are you kidding? I couldn't tell who was in her at this range, and my pilot's vision is A.I.'

'May be I was mistaken.'

'Let's lose them anyway. Hold your seats!'

'In this?'

'I built this hotrod, mister, and I built it to go places.'

The home-made car bounds forward. The car behind does the same; I can see dust spurt from its wheels.

'Take it easy.'

'Nuts!!'

'They're catching up, anyway——'.

'Nuts!!'

'Empire State——N.Y.——eight——two——something. What's Empire State mean?'

'New York license plate. But you can't see that——or can you?'

The car comes no nearer, simply follows ... follows ... falls back ... catches up ... follows ...

We stop at a red light; the car halts some yards behind ... The man in the white hat looks at me casually ... Light changes to green and we pull ahead again.

'Know something, Herb? These guys irritate me.'

Bob doubles round a few blocks, but the brightly coloured car stays doggedly behind us.

'Tell you what, Bob. Try and get ahead a little, then swing round a corner, drop me out and drive like hell. These fellows won't annoy you; it's me they're after. So drop me if you can without them seeing, then lead them a wild chase home.'

'You're not in trouble, are you?'

'Quick! This corner here. Before the light changes.'

Tyres scream as Bob throws his machine into a right-angled turn, and scream again as he pulls into the side.

... Glance behind ... not following ... caught by the red light. ...

'Thanks, Bob. I'll call you later.—Off you go!'

Run into the nearest shop, drug-store or something. Watch Bob climbing the long, straight hill. A moment later our pursuers come into sight, but I've fooled them. They're rushing after Bob ... rushing up the hill ... have fooled them nicely. Now perhaps I can get to Minovsky without being followed.

... Now to find a car hire service ... How do I do that? I ask the girl at the counter—another identical blonde (one who has not attained to stardom or 'angel-hood')—and her expressionless face tells me to look in the yellow pages directory.

The second company I call will be happy to oblige me, and a luxurious chauffeur-driven limousine will be with me right away. Yes, they know where Mount Ramolap is, but they'd like to know where I am.

Again I consult the blonde expressionless face and relay her findings to the car company who tell me to wait just where I am: they'll be right with me. Promptness, Efficiency, Courtesy and Safety are their watchwords. About twenty minutes—or two cups of coffee—later, and after a short, rather pointless conversation with the blonde, a car draws up.

The driver, a jovial optimist, says 'Sure we'll make Ramolap before dark'—He'll take the Freeway to Santa Anna, and I'm really going to enjoy the drive.

7

'WHAT'S THE MATTER, Bud?' (Everybody's called 'Bud' it seems). 'Cops on our tail.'

'Nothing. Just looking behind.'

'Want the radio?'

'No, thanks.'

'Sure.'

When we run into the solid static wall that is called 'Freeway' it occurs to me that something is very wrong in the whole method of transport. We are only using two dimensions. Of course, we are going to have this kind of trouble if they don't find the simple way to step up traffic in layers without the need of costly solid supports. But again, why only use three dimensions? I have heard some talk about a fourth, but it rings false. If you transcend the three physical dimensions you will find not four but six; you will enter into a new set of three, making six in all. But why again should six be the limit? I can see a succession of densities of three dimensions penetrating space and time without limit.

Somewhere in my past life I knew someone who was familiar with these other densities. Nothing concrete in my memory. Not a hint as to its operation, merely that

wordless assurance that it is so. Like so many things in my present existence. I am a mass of unrelated facts and pieces of information. But locked in the recesses, imprisoned by my accident, there is a flowing continuum of knowledge. I am like a driller who knows the field beneath him is rich in oil; but he has no tools to reach it. He knows it's there, but he can't get at it. I am a man who's lost his tools.

However, this factless knowledge has one concrete piece—the crystals are in my pocket. Just to feel them there is re-assurance; they are real and objective. And when these strange speculations come I know they are concerned with the crystals and the thing I have to do.

I know also that despite Mrs Van Elb's hysterical behaviour, there was a fragment of truth in her words. Like oil hidden far below the surface which, when tapped, will make the poor dirt farmer a millionaire overnight, so there are hidden fields of the mind which if connected with the conscious mind could make man momentarily a god. Mrs Van Elb and all these self-appointed mystics are trying to do that but their results are limited because they are going about it in the wrong way.

Somewhere in each man there is a higher mind, omniscient in potential. Some believe that it is separate from, and exterior to, man, but can be induced to work sometimes by prayer and supplication. My own feeling is that higher mind and ordinary mind, like spirit and matter, are only the two opposite ends of the same thing—the positive and negative poles. If one could achieve union between them, if I could make that link, then I should know everything. There would be a sudden rolling away of darkness, a clear and perfect vision instead of these sudden and fragmentary glimpses which fade before I can understand them.

That night Bunny came into my cabin there was a momentary sensation that I was going to break through. For a moment I could see the whole ship and everyone in it: for a second I knew their innermost thoughts and being. Then it was gone, and Bunny had fled in terror.

My driver talks incessantly, but with such regular monotony he is no more distracting than the noise of the engine. He doesn't seem to mind whether I answer him or not, which saves the effort of replying. Although I haven't been listening, I find, with some amazement, I've digested all he said—the sum history of his relatives, his married daughter in Scranton, Pa., the son in the army, and his nephew at Needles, Arizona. I have absorbed his family statistics and also a running commentary on the geography, topography and history of Southern California; though I suspect the latter to be more imaginative than accurate, the fact remains that I have absorbed it all unconsciously while speculating in different fields.

... Interesting discovery! I can think of one thing, and listen to another *at the same time*. I could repeat back my thoughts and also, word for word, his eclectic monologue. . . .

... I know that few people have this ability. . . .

... Now if few minds can do this, it is a gift to be prized. The point is, does this represent an old faculty restored, or do I owe it to something new and unusual?

That lump in my pocket . . . that little package of glassy fires . . . at times feel almost warm, like living creatures . . . lustres of pure intelligence . . . invisible fires radiating some force imperceptible to normal senses . . . a strange force powerful enough to impress a sensitive woman . . . Bunny, frightened in my cabin . . . Emerald, restless and unable to continue her clairvoyance. . . . 'Power in this room,' she said. 'Too much power.' . . .

And then the fiasco when she attempted trance . . . 'Like a burning wall.' She sensed it around us . . . in a moment of super-sensitivity she felt the power, and it blinded her.

If they are responsible for this change; if wearing them on my body causes my mind to open, it may be—it could just be—that here are the tools I have been wanting to pierce the barrier between conscious and super-conscious mind. . . .

I could laugh . . . If that's the case, Emerald has sold her crystals for a mortgage on a lump of marble. She coveted the magician's robes more than the power. Had she kept her trust, she might by now have a thing beyond price—the seership she pretends.

. . . If such a thing exists . . .

. . . Is there true seership?

. . . I don't know. I haven't the experience to judge, but I feel it does. Not in temples built with blocks of oil shares and blocks of marble, but in hidden, unexpected places . . . in the secret places of the Sun.

We have left the coast . . . last and are now heading into the brown-paper hills. We climb a rocky gorge and emerge in a precipitous valley formed by five mountains of gigantic boulders. It is like coming upon a familiar view; like recognising a place often seen in pictures.

'Is this a well-known beauty spot?' I ask the driver, for I may have seen photos in the past.

His stream of information stops flowing and he thinks. He thinks a good long while, baffled at finding I actually have a voice; something he hadn't considered.

'Guess not', he replies, and switches back effortlessly into the flow where he left it.

Odd that I should know this place. . . . Flash of its

contours and details, an unusual kind of map on a table. Special markings. Part of it ringed like the target for an operation . . . and others standing beside me, studying. . . .

. . . Past or present? . . . One more baffling occurrence to attribute to the crystals? or simply another half memory struggling to the surface? . . .

But the picture has gone and the driver has now lost himself, and we spend the next half hour asking the way and trying to find the branch road up Mount Ramolap.

He calls out to a car pulled in at the roadside: 'I'll ask these guys—Hey, Buster, do you know the way to Minovsky's place?'

Three men sitting on the grass playing cards: 'Carry on another mile. Can't miss it; it's the top of this road.'

'Thanks, Buster.'

The next mile is precipitous in the extreme and the radiator boils by the time the road peters out into a mere track leading into the National Forest.

'This is about as far as I can take you. Do you want me to wait?'

'No, thanks. I don't know how long this is going to take. I'll get back some other way.'

I pay him off, guide him while he turns, then I follow the path until it comes out suddenly on the edge of a plateau. . . . Splendid view from here. . . . Must be four or five thousand feet high. . . . Line after line of rolling blue and brown mountains, and in the far distance the sparkle of the Pacific Ocean. The air is pure and sweet smelling . . . glad to get the acrid stench of smog out of my lungs . . . beautiful here . . . peaceful . . . perfect retreat for a recluse.

Winding path into the pines and live oaks. Commotion in the distance. Two enormous blood-hounds rushing towards me, snarling and barking.

Alarming! for a moment, but not for long. I have no animosity towards them. Wish them friendship and they respond. Yes, they are breaking into a trot . . . now a walk . . . now they are running round me, licking my hands and giving little grunts of pleasure.

'Come on, boys, let's find your master!'

With my bounding escort we go further into the forest, the dogs running ahead, leaping, playing, running back to me with snorts of enthusiasm. . . .

. . . A log bungalow showing up ahead. The dogs quiet and walking at my heels, one on either side . . . this must be it. . . .

No one at home? . . .

I walk round the hut.

Not a sound, no sign of life. . . .

Suddenly a head appears in the middle of the ground. Nothing more, just a head with curly silver hair and enormous blazing eyes. Eyes black like ebony, looking at me with a mixture of surprise and amusement. I know that face, have seen it before; know it very well.

What the hell?' asks the head.

'Good-day to you. I'm looking for Elias Minovsky.'

'I'm Minovsky.'

He grins broadly, a tremendous grin: 'I'll be right with you.'

The head has a body. The body is standing in a hole in the ground, and the head had popped up through a kind of man-hole. A barrow nearby is filled with evil-smelling sludge.

Minovsky scrambles out of the pit, his clothes filthy.

'I'm cleaning out the septic tank. I wasn't expecting no visitors.'

'I'm sorry to take you by surprise, but I have to see you urgently.'

He stands well over six feet in height, a magnificently built man of about sixty. He has a lion-like head and thick, iron-grey hair. But by far the most compelling features are his eyes. They seem to be trying to look right through me, half amused, half baffled, unable to make much of what they see.

'What did you do to those boys?' he asks, pointing to the dogs. 'I've never seen them act that friendly before. Who are you, anyway?'

'My name's John Hollings Lutterworth, and I've come all the way from England.'

'Yeah, I guessed you were a limey from the way you talk. What brings you here? I don't see people. Not any more.—Heck, those dogs usually scare the devil out of anyone who comes along this path. That's why I keep them. Never seen 'em act so friendly. What if you do to them?'

'Nothing.'

He looks at me again in that piercing manner.

'Come on round the back. We can talk there.'

He leads me to a small patch of grass beneath an enormous tree where there is a garden swing seat and a couple of chairs and a table with a shaky leg.

'You'd better take the swing. I'm dirty. I'll sit here.'

He continues to look at me with that expectant penetrating smile: 'I've only known it once before for those two dogs to behave like this, and that was when a couple come up here—' He breaks off, staring at me intently as if he is trying to read my mind.

I decide not to waste time. Without taking my eyes from him, I bring out the crystals and tip them into his hand. The transformation is fantastic and complete. For a moment I feel he is going to break down and cry; his whole face trembles with joy, fear, awe and simple relief.

He just looks from me to the crystals and from the crystals back to me, and tears fill the great black eyes.

He wipes his eye with the back of a grimy hand: 'I didn't—I never thought I'd see one of these again.'

'You know what they are?'

He nods.

'What are they?'

'Why ask?'

'Because I have to know.'

'If you don't know, you're not the one I thought you were.' He stands up, towering over me. 'Look, I've betrayed them once: I'm not doing it again. I can't tell you unless you do something.'

'Do what?'

He laughs sadly: 'If you were who I hoped you were I wouldn't have to tell you—you'd know!'

'Aren't these tubes identification enough?'

'Part of it. The way the dogs treated you, that was another part. But there's something more to come, and if you don't know it, I'm not giving it to you.'

'If I did know it once I don't know it now. I've lost my memory!'

'Lost your memory, huh?' He smiles sceptically.

'I had a bad blow on the head—two in fact—one here and one there.'

'Right on the pineal and supracal glands? Could be—'

'Just listen to my story: judge for yourself.'

'Go ahead; but I can't promise I'll believe anything.'

Briefly I tell of events since I woke up on the boat; from time to time I think I detect sympathy in his great dark eyes.

'Brother, you've certainly been given the run around. Global gave me the full treatment, too.'

'Not only Global.'

'Who else?'

'The crowd who met me off the boat.'

'Did one have a rat-face?'

'Yes.'

'And a screwy way of looking sideways at you?'

I nod.

'But those guys *are* Global! They're Widlow's personal bodyguard!'

'*What!* !'

'You're telling me! They came up after me a couple of times. Why do you think I keep these hounds?'

'Then I was right. I'd suspected Widlow, but I couldn't be sure. Of course! How else would he know there were seventy-seven crystals unless those charmers told him? I had an extra one on the boat, but it must have got lost. When rat-face took me to pieces there were seventy-seven, and Widlow knew it. Wait a minute: something here doesn't make sense. Why should he have me beaten up one day, and invite me to lunch the next?'

'From the story you've told me I reckon it's this way: Widlow didn't get to hear of you till you were nearly in New York Harbour. He tells the boys to get what he wants, but doesn't tell them how.'

'That's a possible explanation. I suspected Widlow was behind my little reception when I saw what kind of man he is. But it still doesn't explain the accident on the boat.'

'You reckon that *was* an accident?'

'Yes, I think it was. People who saw it said I slipped on a patch of oil and fell down a ladder in the engine room when a particularly big wave hit the ship. Unless Professor McPherson who was with me did it.'

'Or one of the crew?'

'That would rule out Widlow. He didn't know I was aboard at that time.'

'So that would mean another crowd were after you, too.'

'I don't believe it.'

'Nor do I. That was just a plain, simple accident.'

'You being psychic?'

'No, John. Just following my feelings. It's this way, I reckon: Violence is a pretty strong force. It hangs around for some long time unless it's deliberately removed by a stronger force. If you'd been sloshed on the head deliberately, I guess I'd kinda sense it. So would you.'

'Mr Minovsky, just who gave you the two crystals?'

He looks at me deeply, then turns away.

'Haven't I proved myself? Don't you believe me?'

He says nothing.

'Look, I've got to find out. My life may depend on it, and you're the only living man who can tell me.'

'May be—then again, may be not.'

'What more do you want?'

'How do I know you're not one of Widlow's mob?'

I begin to get angry: 'How could I be? He beat me up, didn't he?'

'Oh, sure, sure, if you say so.'

'Then take a look at these. I'll strip off and show you—Look at these marks! Look at them!'

'Those don't prove nothing. Anyway, they're nearly gone!—I have to be careful, Mr Lutterworth. Dammit, I have to be! I'm a man out on a limb, and I don't have no Global or big-shot lawyers behind me. I'm a hunted man and I suspect everyone who comes here. Goddurn it, wouldn't you?'

'I don't know!'

'There's some things I like about you, but I want to

know you a little while better before I go trusting you.' He pounds the table. 'My own pupil!—My trusted friend!—A woman I loved like my own sister—a woman I thought I knew better than myself. I've no sooner given her my trust than she steals the two tubes I had and sells them to Widlow. I tell you, that Emerald's shaken my faith in human beings!'

I answer quietly: 'Through me that faith will return.'

'Oh, brother! If you could do that—If you could do that one thing!'

'You won't be disappointed.'

'I wish I could help you more, but I daresn't— —not just yet awhile.'

'All right, I won't press the point for the moment. But answer me this: did you tell Emerald their real purpose?'

'What's your guess?'

'My guess is —no.'

He nods.

'At least I had sense enough not to do that.'

'But she thinks you did.'

'I gave her a blind. I told her they were for a new-type combustion engine, and she believed it. When she found them I had to tell her something.'

'Global believe it, too.'

'Let 'em. Let 'em. Suits me fine!'

He pauses, hesitates, then makes up his mind. 'I'll tell you this much. A man and a woman gave them to me.'

'A man and a woman! That's what I wanted to know! The people I came to meet! Who are they? Where can I find them?' I can barely hold back my excitement.

'If they want to, they'll find you.'

'That's no good. I must find them now!'

He shakes his head. 'You'll never find them like that; no one will.'

Before I can continue he jumps up and begins walking towards the house. 'Come in and have some food with me. You must be hungry.' . . . I don't want food. I want information. I follow him into the house and tackle him again, but without success. The more I insist, the more evasive he becomes. Suddenly he switches the subject: 'How many of those things did you say you had in the boat?'

'Seventy-eight. But what's that got to do with it?'

'Are you sure there was seventy-eight?'

'No, I wasn't to begin with. When I first counted I kept getting eighty-six. But a girl who was with me made it seventy-eight. We kept re-counting, and every time we each got our own total. I put it down to the state of my head. I'd only been conscious two days and my mind was still playing tricks.'

'How many did you say?'

'Is it important?'

'It may be.'

I repeat: 'Seventy-eight and eighty-six.'

'Yeah—Hold it a moment. I've got a hunch.'

He does some quick mental calculation and smiles, pleased with his result. It works. Yes, it works out.'

'What does?'

'You've been counting in Nines. The girl was counting in Tens. This is what I mean: if you had seventy-eight crystals and counted them in Tens in the usual way, you'd come to what we call seventy-eight; wouldn't you? But if you had the same number and counted them in Nines, then you'd get the result of eighty-six. See?'

'Yes, I see. But why should I have wanted to count like that?'

Again he fixes me with a penetrating stare. 'That's what I'm asking you. It just came natural to you, didn't

it? As if it were the way you'd counted all ybur life?'

'Does it really matter?'

Again he gives that surprised and disappointed laugh; again he seems waiting for me to do something. When I do nothing he answers: 'It may matter so doggurn much that I could tell you about the man and woman who brought me the first crystals.'

'Yes——?'

'Giving them to me was the first part of a plan. I was to hold them safely until another man came up here and gave me the second part.'

'And I am that man?'

'Sometimes I think you are: sometimes I think you're not.'

'Is it my fault if I've lost my memory?'

'Wish to hell I knew, Mister. Wish to hell I knew. . . . O.K. Let's skip that for a moment; let's get back to the girl on the boat. Can you describe her?'

'Tall, leggy and very shapely.'

'Dark or fair?'

'Dark, curly hair, rather naughty blue eyes—wide eyes, wide mouth, very pretty and very determined.'

'Hell, no: that isn't the one. —No, she wasn't like that.'

'If you'd only describe these two people it might stir the missing part of my memory. They're obviously the ones I have to meet.'

'I'm not rushing nothing! I've got to be certain this time. I was fooled once before, and I'm not being fooled again. So just stick around—stick around and let me do the thinking.'

'It's all very well for you to say "stick around", but I'm being followed, and it won't be long before we have company.'

'What dō you want for supper? Canned beans do you?'

... No use ... you'll just have to play it his way ... say little ... be patient and let him do' all the talking ... 'Obstinate pollack' is right. ...

'You're married, John', he suddenly informs me.

'How do you know?'

'You've a very loyal and beautiful wife, and she's worried she hasn't heard from you. I sometimes pick that kind of thing up from people. No, I don't use any psychic stuff. I just use the powers that God gave all of us—powers most folks don't know they possess, or are too lazy to develop.'

'Do you know where she is?'

'No. All I get is the impression that her thoughts are searching for you. Don't worry. She'll find you. Just relax, and don't block your mind with fear. Let her thoughts come in and you'll make the contact. You see, every human is like a radio set. Well, you know what happens if you keep on transmitting? You can't receive, you get no messages. But if you switch off and wait, letting the mind go passive, then you get something. I've tried to teach that all my life, but no, it's not good enough. Some folks have to go off and develop all this trance stuff because, through that, they can put on a better show. Emerald, for example. She was a very fine telepath until she got this idea in her head that she was God's Anointed. All she gets now are her own thoughts, and other people's subconscious, plus a little telepathy thrown in which she objectifies into what she calls her guides.'

'What do you know about Emerald?'

'She has certain abilities, but she's misusing them. You can't sell that kind of thing for dollars. Reckon I blame myself for not teaching her better.'

'She said she saw something around me. A burning wall, she said—it had me worried.'

Elias smiles inwardly: 'Intense light is like darkness; too much light can blind a person if they don't know how to look at it. If Emerald saw what I hope she saw—if she saw what I hope I'm going to see, too, then I'll be able to tell you plenty. Hell, John, you've got me worried. Every new thing you say tells me I ought to give you what you want to know. But I've been caught badly once, and I'm not going to be caught again. You—you wouldn't want it any other way. When you *know*, you will be glad I was so damned cussed.'

'I shall just have to trust you, Elias. You see—you're the only one I have left. If I don't find my people before Widlow catches up with me—well, you know Widlow, and I don't think he'd stop at much.'

Again there are tears in the old man's eyes, the only outward sign of his tremendous struggle with himself.

'Sometimes, John, I kid myself that by coming up here and meditating, I've learned a little more than most folks, but at times like this I see how little, how damned stupidly little I know.'

.

Slowly the sunfingers shift through the trees and shadows fill the hut. Elias prepares some food which we eat in silence. Afterwards he begins talking again, carefully avoiding my questions. But I realise he is talking for a purpose, watching me, studying every reaction to his statements; I am on trial for my very existence.

First he tells me his beliefs. With direct simplicity he outlines the cyclic journey of the spirit, from its first inception in the Divine Mind, its separation and plunge into matter; its descent through different levels of being

to its emergence into conscious life through a body, and through countless other bodies, upwards on the return path of perfection. He talks simply and without using tedious metaphysical terms. He speaks with a poetic and economical use of words I imagine the teachers of old must have employed when sitting out in the deserts with their little bands; in the desert to avoid persecution for their beliefs; Minovsky hiding in a mountain forest to escape persecution for his secrets. A man unimpressed by money or earthly power is a formidable set-back to the plans of progress——particularly the progress of Hasley B. Widlow.

From time to time he asks me my opinion, and I feel he sometimes says things deliberately false to test me. Then, with what inner conviction I have, I gently correct him; easily, for it is all coming back to me; like hearing boyhood tales re-told; like reading an old and familiar book. We understand one another; we speak a form of the same language.

We fall silent and he seems satisfied.

Suddenly he demands: 'Ever heard of "The Time of Splendour"?'

'I think I——Yes!'

'Know what it is?'

'The Prodigal Son.'

'Care to describe it?'

'No man can do that. It is beyond the power of human conception. Even could I remember fully, I know it only as wordless knowledge.'

Serene joy in his eyes . . . He is standing up . . . his hand is on my shoulder and leading me out . . . leading me away from the hut . . . through the darkened forest . . . I have passed my tests.

'Care to take a look at the stars before we go to bed?

I've a little telescope fixed up on the plateau's edge and the viewing's pretty good up here—This mountain has the clearest air in the world.' . . . Not what I was expecting. . . . But don't be impatient . . . let him come round to it his own way. . . .

Through the trees we come to a sudden clearing and a sudden precipice . . . tiny dark countryside below, spreading to endless horizons. . . . But the sky . . . the sky . . . is beyond every glory. 'The sky is limitless, is jewel-swept, is far flung clusters of perfect light, is radiant, blazing and silent in the high cold night. One star, brighter and more beautiful than the rest, hangs over the horizon. Lavender, peacock rose and ivory, it seems to beckon, seems alive—alive like the crystals. Minovsky observes my interest and says: I thought that star would attract you.'

'The Flame in the Heart of the Wheel' —

'Is that what it's called?'

'I don't know. The words just came into my head.'

From horizon to horizon bends a milky bow, a vast star-arch hanging vibrant in the high clear air, seeming so near you could reach out and grasp it. One by one shapes appear that I know, familiar constellations, and others, too, that I don't know.

'Strange, some constellations seem slightly out of place; the long bar of Adona is foreshortened.'

'It's that change of latitude, John. You're used to seeing them from England.'

'Maybe that's it' —

'I've just got Saturn in the telescope, and four of her satellites. Take a look.'

'It's got a ring round it!'

'There's more things moving out there than stars and planets', he says with a sudden air of mystery. 'I've seen

things out there that don't fit into the books at Palomar or any other observatory. Meteorites and asteroids don't change course and speed. They don't come down to earth and then go up again. Oh, why are some men so vain as to imagine they're the only living, crawling thing in the eternal mansions'

'I see no reason to think we are. If the state of conscious being we call Mind is a universal principle, then it exists throughout space.'

'That's what I always figured. Then one day I had the proof'

He points down the valley to a small ravine about a thousand feet below us.

'That's where they came down I was up here watching. Around one in the morning one night a year ago I saw it come down'

'What did you see'

'Like a falling star, I thought at first. But it was no meteorite. It came down from about sixty degrees. It got to twenty degrees from the horizon, then it levelled off and began to drift with an inclined motion. For several minutes it drifted, then it brightened up and plumed right down in that little ravine. It sank behind those two live oaks you can just see and lit them up from behind; a steady, glowing, pulsating sort of light. Then the light dimmed'

'What did you do'

'I marked the spot. I know that valley. I got my old Ford started, and put the dogs in with me, and then I drove like the wind down the back trail till I couldn't go any further in the right direction. Then I parked by the roadside and walked.'

'Were you afraid'

'No, I was kinda excited. It was almost like being in a

dream. I felt they wanted me to come, and were waiting in that valley for me. Well, I hadn't walked far before I came across them. a man and a woman.'

'Just ordinary people?'

'Look, a man's a man, and a woman's a woman: I don't care where they come from.'

'How were they dressed?'

'Pretty much like you and I. A kind of T shirt and pants. The girl was dressed the same as him.'

'Well, they were probably just a couple taking a late walk.'

'Oh no they weren't! Not these two!'

'How do you know?'

'They'd come from the valley, and the dogs never barked at them never once!'

'How near were you to the valley?'

'About a mile and a half'

'Then they could have come from anywhere.'

'They could've, but they didn't. They'd come out of the ship that lay hidden in the valley.'

'Did you speak to them?'

'You bet I did. They greeted me as I came up. Greeted me almost like an old friend. I was with them nearly an hour. During that time they told me a lot of things. where they'd come from and what they were doing here. Then they told me they wanted me to be part of a mighty big plan. They were contacting people in different countries and giving each one a piece of a jig-saw. It was the girl who gave me the two crystals. I've seen some lovely women in my time, but that one took the prize. Then she gave me a sign by which I would know anyone who was in the group they were forming. They told me never to reveal the sign to anyone; but to speak only to one who would come here one day and give me that

sign—I was kind of hoping you'd give it—but you didn't, so I can't tell you any more.'

A dreadful sense of disappointment . . . a wonderful old man and a wise one, but now in his old age given to dreams. A beautiful dream, but not a true one, a fantasy, typical of his gentle mind.

'How come you can tell me this much, if I couldn't give you this sign?'

'I've not betrayed any secrets. I've not told you anything important they told me.'

'I don't doubt your sincerity. But you never actually saw the ship—You only saw something bright appear to fall in that valley. There is nothing to prove that these ordinary people, dressed in earthly clothes, came from another world. It could be that they represent this group which I believe to be an international group of idealistic scientists, who plan to release a dangerous invention the safe way; that is, by not letting it get into the hands of any big power interests. They chose the night-time to visit you for the reasons of secrecy; travelling the last part of the way on foot, in case your house was being watched. It just so happened that before you met them, you saw a large meteorite fall. Why, it probably never even reached the earth. Look, the sky dips right down to that cleft in the valley. The meteorite could have been a couple of hundred miles away, but it would still look as if it fell in that valley.'

'You're a scientist all right. I only have to listen to the way you're talking. But I can prove that what I tell you is true. When I got back to my car I turned and watched for a while. About ten minutes later they took off.'

'Did you actually see a ship?'

'It took off so fast I barely saw anything. Just a flash and a streak of light; then it was gone.'

'Another meteor—HEY! Look at that one!'

A huge blue, fiery trail coasts silently over our heads, spraying out like a bursting rocket, remaining visible for several seconds. •

'There's a perfect shooting star for you.'

'Mister, I've seen more meteors than you have. I'm not an amateur astronomer for nothing. But this was no meteor. It went *upwards*. Meteors don't go upwards. There's such a thing as Newton's law.'

'It may have *appeared* to go upwards. As you say, it was a sudden flash. A really swift descent, if it was almost instantaneous, could look as if it was travelling in either direction—upwards or downwards.'

He sets his jaw obstinately. 'I saw it come down, and I saw it go up. And I spoke to the folks that were in it.'

'Did they actually tell you what planet they'd come from, in so many words?'

'No—but they hinted. They said they'd travelled a long way for a long time. They said they'd come from a place I didn't even know existed.'

'There's plenty of places right on this Earth you or I don't know exist.'

'Not with those crystals, they couldn't.'

'But *why not*? You've been preaching simplicity to me for the past hour or more, why not apply it? Why not believe the simple thing? It's usually the true one. And the simple thing in this case is that they were perfectly ordinary mortals like you and I who represent a secret but otherwise perfectly normal scientific group. I'd have expected this from Mrs Van Elb, but not from you! I can see I've been wasting my time.'

Sick with disappointment I turn away, leaving him to cover up his telescope. I could have sworn he knew something, for of all the characters involved, Elias Minovsky

seemed the one real, sane, honest man. For hours I've played him along, restrained my impatience, enjoyed his conversation . . . certain he knew the truth behind my mission, certain he'd reveal it once I'd won his confidence . . . And now all I get is a comic strip story about space-men and—for good measure—space-women!

When we reach the house he says: 'I went down into the valley the next day and found a burned circle of grass—a perfect regular circle . . .'.

'Small heath-fire. I passed two on my way up the mountain.'

Now he wants me to believe. Now that I'm a doubter, he's given up hedging and dodging my questions. I should have tried it earlier and saved myself a lot of trouble.

'I got a photo of that ship.'

'In the middle of the night?'

Ignoring my sarcasm he continues, almost desperately: 'No, not that night, about a week later.'

'Why are you suddenly so determined to convince me?'

'Listen, John. I'm not lying to you. This is too big and has gone too far. I was cagey at first till I knew your intentions, but not any more.'

'I don't think it really matters now what my intentions are.' Obstinate he continues: 'This ship came back a week later.'

'Tell me in the morning. I'd like to get some rest.'

'I tell you it came back a week later.'

'It did, did it?'

'Just soon after dawn, I heard army planes zooming and diving beyond the plateau, so I came out to take a look, bringing my camera, in case there was something interesting. Well, the planes fooled around for some ten

minutes, then they moved off; and not till then did I see it. Like a flash in the sun, a small spot of silver coming nearer. It comes on, and for a moment I think it's going to land. It comes to within fifty feet of the plateau and I take a couple of shots. I was so excited my hands shook so I could hardly hold the camera steady. But I got the shots, and they were good ones.'

A sadness comes into his voice. 'But it didn't land. I think it might have done if the planes hadn't disturbed it. But it didn't. I had the impression it wanted me to see it, as if they were saying "Hello", for I waved and I fancied the ship tilted slightly as though answering. Next minute it was gone. Not just moving off, but gone. Like a flash of lightning.'

8

COLD . . . cold like an icy wind . . . even as he's speaking it comes . . . a violent shock . . . almost a physical blow . . . And then the whole growing sense of evil that started as I entered Warren's house is suddenly released and is all around us . . . It has happened . . . Whatever dreadful thing it was has already happened . . . it's too late to do anything about it . . .

Elias is pale and shaking . . .

'You felt it, too?'

He nods.

'What is it?'

In a frightened whisper he answers: 'Nothing like I've ever known.'

'It's bad—Something terrible has happened to my friend—Must get back to Los Angeles at once.'

'Can't get there tonight. My little auto's cracked a cylinder and it's ten miles down to the main road.'

'Is there nowhere I could telephone?'

'Nearest phone fifteen miles down in the valley. And you can't get there this time of night. But there's a farmer drives down to the main road early each morning to fetch the mail. Reckon he'd take you if you were on the track in time. I'll see you make it.'

'What's the time: what's the exact time?'

'I make it twenty after one.'

'I feel that may prove important—whatever it is, it's happened, and I wasn't there to prevent it. I'm too late. I've failed—I've failed!'

He lays a quiet hand on my arm.

'Go to bed, John. Get some rest. What will be, will be. You know you can't alter that.'

.

'Hey! You were going to run off without taking a look at my photos! Oh, you've plenty of time. Jensen won't be passing the turning for at least twenty minutes.'

'Oh, the photos—Yes.'

Had almost forgotten them . . . They don't seem important now . . . Only important thing is to get back and find out what's happened . . .

'Got them inside under a pile of books. Be right with you.'

Some rummaging, something falling . . . a suppressed oath, then, smiling, he re-appears holding a couple of

pictures . . . two rather blurred snaps of something so ordinary it is laughable . . .

. . . That object . . . a thing so common that anyone would recognise it . . . Anyone, that is, except me—who can't remember what it is . . . What is it?

. . . I know the thing . . . I've used it often; so have most people . . . a very familiar shape . . . a common object . . . but at the moment I can't quite place it . . .

Shape . . . a lampshade?—no, not a lampshade, but a familiar object like a lampshade.—A thing like a lampshade but not a lampshade; a round thing made of metal, a thing used by everybody.

. . . Can't think of its name, but I shall. Like so many things I've seen since my blackout, I know them but can't name them. With pictures there is the same sensation; I see the representation, a name springs to my lips and vanishes before I can recall it. Like the picture Warren has over the door . . . painting of a man in a desert, and behind him a huge triangular building . . . I knew it. I'd seen it many times, but I was hopelessly stuck until Warren gave me the word 'Pyramid'! It happens again and again, and it will go on happening until all the blanks are filled in.

Pyramid! . . . Warren! . . . Must go . . . must hurry . . . Mustn't miss the farmer and his lift.

'Well, thanks anyway, Mr Minovsky, for your hospitality. I'm glad I met you.'

'It's been a pleasure for me, too. I'm a little sick of playing hermit up here by myself.'

His eyes drop to the pictures, then look up at me, questioning—pathetic, almost. Like an eager child asking to be told that there is a Santa Claus . . .

What can I tell him?

'I'd like to examine those properly when I've more time.'

His smile fades. He knows what I'm thinking.

'Oh, sure, sure, you're welcome—any time.'

Turning on his heels, he walks back into the house. One of the dogs bares its fangs at me, then gives a little whimper and follows him . . .

But what *was* the object?

. . . Does it matter now? . . . You'll come across one soon enough, probably in a hardware store . . . That's right . . . something in a hardware store, something you can buy for a dollar or two.

Hurry! . . . sound of old engine coming down the hill . . . trail of dust in the distance . . . Hurry . . .

The farmer comes into view, stops at my signal and gives me a ride to the main road at the foot of the mountain. I thank him and he drives away.

Two minutes later another car appears and pulls up beside me, a green car containing the men I saw playing cards by the roadside on my way up to Minovsky's.

'Going to Los Angeles?'

The driver looks delighted to see me, as if I were an old friend. 'Jump right in, Mr Lutterworth.'

Three men step out: three big men, three men surrounding me, smiling—one chewing gum; three men larger than I.

'We'd be happy to run you to Los Angeles, Mr Lutterworth. We missed you when you planed in on Tuesday, and we've been very anxious. Haven't we, boys?'

'We sure have.' The others concur gravely about their general state of anxiety.

'I suppose I should have guessed what you were when I saw you yesterday.—Oh, well!'

The driver nods thoughtfully: 'Yeah, we figgered you'd show up at Minovsky's sooner or later.'

'I hope you enjoyed your card game, at any rate.'

'Had to fill in the time somehow.'

'I lost thirty-two dollars and twenty-five cents', complains another.

'Doubtless, Mr Widlow will make it up to you.'

The complainer smiles, indicating that Widlow is generous to his employees.

The driver opens a rear door, gently but firmly adding me to the passenger content.

'Where are you taking me now?'

'Los Angeles, like you said. Make yourself comfortable, sir.'

We drive off.

'Tell me something; how does Mr Widlow manage to have so many men around?'

The driver shrugs. The man next to me opens his wallet and hands me an envelope. 'Here's your plane ticket, sir. We felt you'd like to get right back to New York and report to Mr Widlow as soon as you were through with Minovsky.'

'Then you'd be wrong. I haven't finished here yet. Tell Mr Widlow I'm not in his employ, and I'll return when it suits me.'

'Sure, sure! It's an open ticket. If you want to see Mrs Van Elb first, we'd be happy to run you over.'

'She's in San Francisco, isn't she, Will?'

'We could all fly out; catch the afternoon flight.'

'If you'd care to see her, sir, just give the word. We'll go straight to the airport.'

'I've already seen her.'

'You have?'

'Yesterday.'

'Well, what do you know? We thought you'd come to Minovsky's first. That was how we figured. We were wrong.'

. . . The other car . . . the car with the New York license plate that chased us from the desert?

'I rather thought you'd know if I'd been there.'

'Will, didn't you say they'd promised to ring if Mr Lutterworth showed up at the Temple?'

'Sure thing, they did.'

'Isn't that like that screwy outfit? Can't be trusted with the simplest thing.'

I smile: 'Don't let Mr Widlow catch you saying that!'

They all laugh at this and Will offers me a cigar.

. . . So that other car wasn't Widlow's men . . . Then whose?

'If there's anywhere else you'd care to call before you leave, sir?—'

—'How about his valise?'

—'What hotel are you in?'

. . . The other car followed Bob . . . they don't seem to know anything about it . . . But I must get to Warren's place and see what's happened . . . but not with these men . . . mustn't drag Warren into it . . . Must give them the slip somehow.

'I'm afraid my luggage has got mis-routed. But don't worry yourselves about that, it will turn up somehow and be sent on to me.'

'Mr Widlow's very disappointed you didn't use his suite at the Statler.'

'Oh, I didn't want to impose on him. He's done quite enough for me already.'

. . . They don't know where I've been staying . . . nothing about Warren . . .

'How did you find Mr Minovsky?'

'Very friendly.'

'That's unusual, isn't it, Will?'

'Sure is, Ric.'

'Mr Widlow will be glad of that. He feels that if anyone could make him talk, you could.'

'Mr Widlow over-estimates my abilities.'

'He thinks a lot of you, sir.'

'He certainly does!'

Then the driver asks: 'Did Minovsky bring out those crappy space-ship photos?'

'He showed me some photos, yes.'

'Reckon I know how those were taken. It's my guess the guy who developed his film was having a game with him. We've checked on that photographer and he's quite a joker. I figure that when Minovsky brought in his film and told his tale, it was more than the photographer could do to resist having a joke on him. So he photographed a lampshade or something and told Minovsky those were his negatives. Minovsky believed it, and how!'

'We ought to check on that some time, Will. Mr Widlow likes to have everything straight.'

The driver considers: 'Yeah, we could do that. But I don't think it's necessary. Old Minovsky's a screwball. Can't think why Mr Widlow's interested in him!—O.K., Mr Lutterworth, sir; if there's nowhere else you want to visit, I guess we'll go straight to the airport and get you on the noon plane to New York.'

'Yeah, he could do that.'

'That's what you'd like to do, isn't it, Mr Lutterworth?'

'If that's what you've decided, who am I to refuse?'

They laugh a lot at that; they think it's very funny.

As we drive on they seem to become remote and unreal. Any fear of them is now lost in something less tangible but more powerful. As we near Los Angeles it begins again; that cold, groping, bottomless fear that enveloped me in Warren's house, the fear that came again early this

morning, bursting suddenly around me like a blow in the night . . . The nearer we come to the city, the stronger it grows, but this time with a difference. It is no longer a warning, it is full, savage and violent. Whatever forces were gathering are now unleashed and I shall find no rest till I know Warren and Selina are safe . . .

But my escorts show no intention of letting me out of their sight. At the airport I make one or two attempts to phone: I say I want to wash, and Will says he could do with one also. I go to the ticket counter to try and get a message sent through the girl, but Will comes with me; we might as well be handcuffed together.

Then I try the obvious and simple approach.

'I'm just going to phone again about my luggage.'

Will, of course, comes with me to the booth, even provides me with a dime. But it is a small booth and has sliding doors. When these are closed there is only room for one inside. Will smiles at me through the glass, but not a very nice smile . . . Good, that means he can't hear a thing. Blocking the view of the dial with my back I quickly ring Warren's number.

Busy . . . line busy . . .

I wait, then try again.

Line still busy.

Gentle tapping on the glass. Will signals they've called my flight. Will boards the plane with me: Will sits down beside me. Coming to New York? . . . But, of course, Mr Widlow feels I need a secretary to look after me and see to my every comfort. Will is always kind and helpful.

.

The plane leaves, we are climbing away from the earth, upwards over the brown and gold deserts. It is like coming up from under water, to be in this pure blue

vastness with nothing below but an empty expanse of sun, sand and wind . . .

. . . Leaving the smog behind . . . leaving the thoughts, the weltering mass-thought of a great upstart trollop city . . . the thoughts and danger . . . Up here is another world. Up here one can think again. Something warm and vibrant in my pocket is helping me to think calmly and construct a reasonable picture. (Will is now asleep and no longer bothers me.)

First . . . I am in possession of some mysterious crystals—properties and use highly speculative.

Second . . . whatever their use they are considered important enough for me to be attacked. Not only on landing, but also on the ship. Was that an accident? Did I slip and fall, or did someone attack me? If so, why?

Two possible reasons—

He could be a maniac . . . Unlikely.

He could be an agent . . . More probable.

If an agent, whose agent? . . .

Widlow's? . . . Government? . . . Foreign Power? . . .

Unlikely he was from Global, for Widlow undoubtedly expected me to arrive in full possession of my faculties. Unless he had an agent on the ship who misunderstood his orders. He said he'd had so little warning. Gave this as an excuse for my rough treatment . . . (was telling the truth in this instance). That could mean his agent only discovered me on the ship towards the end of the voyage . . . *around the time Bunny blabbed about the crystals . . .*

Now, who did she tell?

Professor McPherson . . .

McPherson?

Hardly!

Should never have told anyone had I been in my right mind. That was my first mistake. . . telling Bunny.

Bunny?

No! Too young to be mixed up in such a thing. Not Bunny, but someone she talked to. She says she only told McPherson, but wait . . . McPherson said that Mrs Rainham was at the next table, listening for all she was worth.

Mrs Rainham!—Try and recall her more clearly . . . plump, middle-aged . . . that curious cloak . . . something she wore . . . some ornament . . . Got it!!

Gold star!

That little gold star on a necklet. Miniature of the one Emerald had on her robe . . . *Knew* I'd seen it somewhere before! . . .

Mrs Rainham wore a gold star like Emerald Van Elb . . . Some kind of badge—the sign of their Order . . . that empty chair in the Inner Circle . . . See now why it was empty. Mrs Rainham was absent . . . Luckily!

She recognised the crystals as soon as Bunny described them to McPherson. Probably couldn't wait to get to the radio telephone and call California. She'd ring Emerald, and Emerald would ring Widlow, so by the time Widlow got the story third-hand—he would have a very confused picture of the situation. All he'd know was that an agent of 'The Group' was arriving in New York in a day's time with a whole load of the things. He'd have to act quickly. What does he do? Tells his stooges to stop me and get my plans at all costs. Stooges have primitive ideas as to how this should be expedited. Result—more aches and bruises for the man without a memory . . . Agitation from Widlow when he finds he's boobed.

That all makes sense . . . unless the entire 'Circle' *think* they know the great secret that has paid off their mortgage.

Would you mind giving me a light?

Who said that?

The man across the aisle, fumbling for matches . . .

'Certainly!'

I strike him a match. He looks pleased and surprised.

'Well, *thank* you, sir: I was just going to ask you for one. You must have read my thoughts. Thanks a lot!'

He looks at me a moment as if asking for an explanation, then shrugs, smiles and continues his reading.

How very curious!

He must have thought out loud without knowing it . . .

Now then, back to these crystals. Perhaps my original guess was right, that they are part of a new type radio or television set of a rather revolutionary design. They may have a great part to play in national defence. That would certainly make any power anxious to have them.

Some time later we are passing over a city and I'm wondering what it's called, and a voice that seems to come from Will says: 'Santar Fay', but Will is asleep, so I know it didn't come from him. And a little later, the girl they call Hostess is passing by and she's thinking terrible things about the fat man two seats ahead who keeps punching his bell and wanting things done that don't matter, just because he's mean and thinks he won't get his money's worth unless he keeps the poor girl running. And once again the man who took a light seems to say he's run out of cigarettes, so I offer him the cigar Will gave me which I haven't smoked, and once again the man is very surprised but pleased to get a cigar.

Later I decide to make a test. I move back two seats where Will can't see me, and wait till he wakes up. When he comes out of his doze and finds my seat empty he is frightened at first that I've run off, then he realises I can't have gone far and gets the word 'Can' very distinctly and with evident relief.

'Hello, Will. Had a nice doze?'

'Yeah, just getting forty winks.'

'What's Can?'

'Thought that's where you were—on the can.'

'I'm right here.'

He props himself up. 'Yeah, well stick around.'

And later, much later, I know the girl is going to say 'Fasten your seat belts, please' before even she comes in through the pilot's door to say it.

When we land in New York, Will goes straight to a phone booth. He makes a short call and informs me: 'He wants to see you right away. He says to take you to the penthouse.'

.

Widlow himself opens the door as the servants are long in bed. He's wearing a padded silk dressing gown and he's more than glad to see me. He stirs up a drink with some ceremony, then he closes in for the kill.

'Can't think why you had to trail off to California. Had me worried for a time. Thought you were running out on me to sell to someone else. That's the reason my boys had to keep you close company.'

. . . Don't tell him how you gave them the slip. They have wives to support; and stomach ulcers . . .

'Yes, John, you really had me worried. I kept asking myself 'Why should a guy run off to California just to make up his mind that he's going to co-operate with me, unless—but I guess you had your reasons.'

'As far as I'm concerned it was a fruitless search.'

'A search for what?'

'For myself.'

'Don't get you.'

'Never mind.'

'Oh, you inventors! Reckon you're all a bit crazy, eh? But I appreciated that, not that you're crazy, I mean I appreciate that genius has to be handled its own way, so I let you run off if that was the way you had to do your thinking. Anyway, boy, it's good to see you back. How was California?'

'Very interesting.'

'See Emerald?'

'Yes.'

His eyes gleam slightly. 'Did she tell you anything good? She's a fine medium, is Emerald, one of the best. I'm sure she really impressed you, told you something you never expected, eh?'

'She certainly did.'

'Wonderful woman! That temple of hers, isn't it something?'

'Astounding!'

And those lovely girls, those angels—the four prettiest girls on the Coast, but I'll tell you something—I wouldn't lay a finger on them. Not on those girls. No, sir!'

'I also saw Minovsky.'

'Did he tell you anything?'

'He said the crystals have nothing to do with gas consumption.'

Widlow laughs, dismissing him without even bothering to reply. Then abruptly the smile drops and he is deadly quiet.

'All right, John. What's it to be? Do you work with us, or don't you?'

'I'm afraid not, even if I wanted to.'

'Why not?'

'Because, Mr Widlow, I haven't the faintest idea what any of it's remotely about. No, don't get agitated. let me

finish. I've had a complete and utter lapse of memory, and the crystals may as well be from the moon for all they mean to me.—Oh, don't worry; it wasn't your thugs' beating that caused it; it was that accident on the boat.'

'I don't know what you mean.'

'I refer to the gentlemen you sent to pick me up at the docks. Look, don't get excited, it doesn't matter. The harm was done before they came into the picture; before even you knew about me through Mrs Ramham, who happened to be on board and who told Mrs Van Elb, who told you—somewhat third-hand and not very accurately, I fear.'

Widlow is breathing hard, and rather grey in the face. 'So you've got it all figured out, have you, Lutterworth?'

'Unfortunately not. The important thing still escapes me, and it will escape you because, in case I haven't made it crystal clear—I've lost my memory and I don't know!'

Widlow rises slowly. He comes towards me, his powerful hands clawing his side, his bull head lowered: 'Can't remember, eh? Lost your memory, have you?' His powerful voice rises to a bellow. 'Then I give you just forty-eight hours to get it back again!'

Shortly afterwards he stabs a bell and Will scuttles in to remove me to my hotel.

9

IN THE MORNING I make several attempts to phone Warren in Los Angeles. The line is busy; is out of order; is a discontinued number. I make forceful objections to the phone company through the hotel operators. The company make enquiries. The company tell the hotel operators they are sorry but the line is temporarily out of order. The hotel operators tell me. I tell the hotel to tell the company to keep trying and to call me if anything happens.

I run a bath.

I am in the middle of bathing when the feeling starts again—

PHONE WIDLOW . . .

Loud, clear and persistent.

PHONE WIDLOW . . .

Like a voice in my head, a voice without words, a silent command insisting that I

PHONE HIM . . .

The last thing I would do.

PHONE HIM . . .

Like hell!

PHONE HIM WITHIN THREE MINUTES EXACTLY . . .

But why? . . .

This is different; quite different from wanting to call Warren. That was emotional. This is not. This comes from me, not from others; my thoughts, my knowing. My thoughts coming from the right place, the hidden omniscience, that place of all-knowing—a break-through.

RING WIDLOW WITHIN TWO MINUTES . . .

A break-through at last, a small but definite break-through. Everything tells me keep clear of Widlow, but

the break-through insists, insists, insists—

RING WIDLOW WITHIN ONE MINUTE . . .

I step out of the tub, wrap myself in a towel, ask the operator for Global's number; start drying myself:

'Mr Hasley Widlow's office, please.'

Secretaries and more secretaries, voices improving in attraction until . . . the private secretary, the private voice and the private body, the envy of his less well-equipped colleagues . . .

'Oh, Mr Lutterworth, how good of you to call.' The voice is like scented butter. 'Mr Widlow was in here three minutes ago, but he's just gone out. He'll be back shortly.'

'Three minutes?'

'Funny you should call. I was just wondering if they'd spelt your name right. Is it two t's or one?'

'Two "T"s.'

'That's what I thought. Global in London must have made a mistake, unless it's the wrong Lutterworth.'

'There's several Lutterworths.'

A pause, then a hesitant voice asking: 'Were you born in Harrogate, York 'hire, England, in 1915?'

ANSWLR 'YES'.

'Yes.'

'Then I guess it's you. Thank you, Mr Lutterworth. Would you like me to ask Mr Widlow to return your call?'

. . . Global in London? . . . Born in Harrogate? . . . Then she's got a report on me.

THIS IS WHY YOU HAD TO CALL.

'Is that my full report you have?'

'Er—yes, came in this morning.'

'Would you care to check it with me for details?'

She hesitates: 'But it's confidential.'

'Look, it's either correct or it's incorrect. If it's incorrect only I can correct it. I'm just trying to help you.'

. . . My whole background, the past I crave, all there on her desk, and Widow safely out of the office.

Suddenly she makes up her mind. It's very good of me to help her. She'll check it through if I have time.

I have time.

'John Hollings Lutterworth, Hollings spelt h, o, two "l"s—as in loving—l, n, g, s as in sugar. Born Harrogate, Yorkshire, 1915. Educated at the local grammar school, took honours in physics and engineering, scholarship to Cambridge—that's the English Harvard—1934—but then I guess you know.' Gentle such laugh. 'You took several science degrees and a Doc.Phil., taught for a year after graduation. Then you inherited some money—quite a bit, by the look of it—and bought Thorpe Manor on Pickering Moor, rather a lonely sort of place, judging by the report. There, as far as we can tell, you conducted your own experiments and ran a private laboratory. Then there's a query—One set of records say you were killed in an air raid in 1941. But a note here says that was an error and you were really working for the British Government on secret radar development. In 1945 you went back to Yorkshire and continued your researches. All highly secret by the sound of it. Not even Global's been able to dig up much, but they will, don't worry, Mr Lutterworth. Soon we'll have all the facts.'

'What way secret?'

'Doesn't say, Mr Lutterworth, that's the end of the report. Not very much, considering the time it's taken London to prepare, is it?'

HANG UP NOW . . .

'Shall I have Mr Widow call you back?'

'No, please don't bother. And one other thing—don't tell him I called.'

'Oh, I couldn't do that. All calls to this office are automatically enumerated and listed.'

'Then don't tell him you checked the report with me. He may not like you for it.'

'I wasn't going to anyway—Here he comes. Goodbye now.'

There, you see? The timing was perfect. You followed the break-through and it was absolutely correct. Three minutes, it said. Three minutes to ring Widlow. It took three minutes to get through to his private secretary, and he had been out of his office exactly three minutes. And I knew!

How did I know?

I don't know how I knew, but it's happening too often to be mere coincidence; the voices on the plane, this knowing things in advance, this sudden hearing someone's voice as if he was talking aloud, that silent voice that breaks through from an unknown inner self, and is always right. I can't believe it's all a result of a bump on the head.

And it can't be a natural thing, or I'm the greatest psychic of the age. Which is most unlikely, for I'm a scientist. A down-to-earth English scientist, degreed and respectable. Or so Global have found out.

If I'm a scientist, what am I doing with things like this? Van Elb, Minovsky, voices in the head? Or I'm the biggest crank of them all?

How did Minovsky get hold of the crystals, by the way?

YOU GAVE THEM TO HIM . . .

Oh, don't start that again. What?—I gave them?—

Well, did I?—

Did I?

I listen a long time.

Silence.

Apparently, this thing doesn't work to order—not yet.

Then let's go back to reasoning. I gave Minovský a couple of crystals . . . Why?

Presumably they are so dangerous that I farmed out a couple on the most unlikely and remote person possible as a safety measure. I didn't take them in person, but sent two of the group, a man and a woman.

Then why all that nonsense about them arriving in a space-ship? Why the fairy tale? And why those corny photos?

A blind, an elaborate blind to put off the inquisitive and to test the genuine. If I'd been the man he was expecting I'd have recognised it, called his bluff and given him the sign he was waiting for. Yes, that was the real trouble. Some kind of recognition signal had been arranged between him and our group. I couldn't give it because I'd forgotten it, even though I may be its author. That *would* be funny—The sign-maker foiled by his own sign!

Well, one thing about Minovsky, he knows how to keep a secret. There must be some virtue to him or we should not have chosen him. Clever old boy. If someone presses too hard; put him off the scent. Tell Van Elb one thing; tell me another. Tell Van Elb they're for revolutionary motors, tell me they come from space.

What the hell *are* they for?

Why are they so important?

What do they do?

One little sign. If I'd only remembered that sign, he'd have told me everything. But I'll say this for you, Elias; you're loyal. You sure are loyal!

IO

THEY ARE after me . . .

The breakthrough comes more often now. Not when I want it, not when I expect it, but suddenly and at random, cutting across all other thoughts like a special announcement on a radio programme, and always the same thing . . .

They are after me . . . not Widlow's men, but others. They know what I am going to do so they are closing in. They will kill me without hesitation, for they are more ruthless than Widlow's men. They will kill me because of the thing I have to do.

One day, two days, have I been in New York and no sign of my group. No one who can tell me what I came to do. Only the shadows following me, two blocks, one block, sometimes only a few yards behind.

Make no mistake. They're going to attack. As soon as I try to do the thing I have to do they will close in, and no one will see them. It will all look so natural, a crowd jostling on the side walk, a man falling on his face, a body stumbling under a bus, or a muffled report like an exhaust and a man left to die in the street. Before anyone can help me I'll be dead, and the killers will have gone, swallowed up in ten million other people minding their own business.

If I concentrate too much their thoughts seem to fade, but if I relax the mind, they pour through me in a meaningless torrent. I find that by controlled concentration I am able to position them, attune to them as it were so their thoughts stand out, revealing the whereabouts of the sender. I can't always get the actual thought itself, though I can feel its intention. The conscious minds

of my shadows contain many fleeting things, many of them quite unconnected. But their fixed purpose, their relentless intention of keeping me in sight—that reaches out at me like a long tentacle clutching the back of my head, and every bit as uncomfortable.

Each minute I am growing more proficient. At first I was barely aware of them. The conviction that I was being followed was no more than a hunch; a hunch that increased to an absolute certainty as I sent out probing signals and received definite answers. And each time I probed my remarkable new powers gained strength. Such fantastic rapid progress is impossible to explain by any natural means. Therefore, one must look for some artificial reason for my sudden burst into psychic proficiency. . . . What have I got that others haven't? . . . What makes me different to any other? What do I have that is unique? . . .

A forgotten secret?

What else?

A crack on the head.

An injury to the pineal gland would have the exact opposite effect to this.

What else?

By elimination there's only one thing left . . . the *crystals*.

Incredible as it may seem, their contact with my body is making their purpose clearer every minute. They are nothing to do with any triumphery gasoline improvements, blueprints, or electronic computers. They are the keys to the hidden places of the mind. From their power no living mind could withhold its secrets. No buried treasure, no carefully guarded secret, no despots, no state, no group could hide its devices or stay hidden. They are the most terrible weapon ever invented.

And I am their inventor.

The enormity of my discovery is no real shock. I had suspected hidden power in the crystals for some time, hardly daring to believe it. Now I am certain.

*Of another thing, too, I am equally certain;—however amazing their effect on my brain, that is sheer accident. They are not designed to work by being carried around in the pocket, but through some kind of an instrument or machine. The fact that I, through having them on my body, begin to act like that instrument, is no more remarkable than a woman Selina mentioned who could pick up radio programmes through the metal in her teeth . . . an accident . . . an unintentional by-product . . . no more. I cannot believe I intended them to work haphazardly. I designed them each, I am sure, to fit into some small instrument, a receiver and transmitter a thousand times more powerful in this respect than the human brain. What I am receiving is like music in the next apartment, a muffled echo, a distorted fragment of their real strength.

That's what I came to do—to find the group who have the instruments but not the crystals. We are to meet at a carefully chosen time and place to bring the two together. But they cannot find me for they have no way of knowing what has happened. At this moment, perhaps, they are waiting, wondering why I do not come; waiting, worrying.

Yet they knew (and I must have known unconsciously) that on arrival from the boat I would go to the Sherry Plaza. For only they could have left the envelope with nine hundred dollars. In that case they will know where to find me. . . . Should know! . . . *must* know!

Had I the rest of the machine I'm sure I could find them. With a crystal correctly aligned inside, it could cast

around, picking up and sifting thoughts like sand. And, having found one of interest, could bore straight into that thinker's mind sucking it dry of secrets. The ultimate invasion of the person!

The final destruction of privacy, the final hideous penetration of a sanctuary whose capture would make man less than a slave—an automaton.

Could I, wilfully, with full knowledge and intent, have designed such ghastly strength?

Could such powers even exist?

My throbbing, bursting head gives me the answer. For now it is almost a torment to walk the streets or move in crowded places, for as the power of the crystals increases, so do the veils grow thinner (those merciful veils which have been with us so long we have forgotten their existence), thinner like the mists, parting to reveal the private gardens of men's minds.

Gardens?

Prisons, private prisons and torture chambers, gardens of rotting bones and strangling weeds and, in the midst of the choking thorns, faces—sad, tired, bewildered faces . . . faces that join together on winds of sadness to form the terrible naked horizons of suffering humanity.

To walk the streets is a torment, greeds and envies, lusts, hates, worries and miseries jostle together seeking openings in my mind. Those silent figures packed standing in the buses, all their wants, all their worries, all the longing, numbness and frustration, the numb frustration. The pathetic little hopes and torn illusions. All the loves not returned, the desires unrequited, the hopes—the pathetic hopes, like fine strands of gold trying to force their way through black fog.

The fears, belly-twisting fears that nag and drive sleep from the night, fears of fellow workers, of employers, of

unemployment, of disease, of death, of man, of God. . . . Fear makes them do what they are doing, makes them work, eat, exist. Fear of hunger and death drives them onwards; unknowing and, after a while, uncaring. All the little people, so small beneath the vast cliff buildings, their bodies so soft beneath the machines that drive them, their bodies soft and aching for love.

An ugly girl . . . a young girl. . . . Men never look at her. She wants men to look at her more than she wants life. Her mind is a knot of pain, hardened through repetition. . . . She watches a beautiful woman walk past—proud that she knows she is beautiful, high-necked, high in her own assurance. . . . Like a serpent of envy, the hate leaps out at her, only to recoil, baffled, on to the sender, increasing her pain. . . . To desire and be not desired. . . . That is pain.

All the little hopes and plans, the new babies, the expected bonuses, the secret tumours and devouring cancers, the numb cow-eyes of resignation, of struggle, of refusal to submit . . . they flood upon me in a tide too powerful to withstand. . . .

Tears, hot blinding tears for them; I cannot bear to see their suffering, for to watch, and be helpless is worse than to suffer each pain in my own person. For the first time I have seen people, not the masks, not the mercifully veiled exteriors, but the souls exposed in the light, the immeasurable aggregate scream of anguish that is the suffering of ten million souls. . . .

This is the sight God sees through eternity. . . .

Would anyone be God?

.

On the little terrace of my hotel room it is quieter. All the thoughts I had stolen are down there in the streets.

Stay down there! Don't come up here! Let me alone! I didn't want you and you must stay down there. Down there where you belong. Not up here! I'm up here, trying to close my mind to you. Sometimes I can do it, and make you bearable, no worse than the distant traffic roar—down there, not up here!

I could stop it easily by not carrying the crystals on me. Then, surely, my mind would close and I'd become ordinary again. But I dare not. I dare not part from them. Lock them in a vault, in the hotel safe, hand them over to the police, someone—~~one~~ of my shadowers—would get his hands on them. What would happen then is too hideous to imagine.

I could destroy them.

How?

Throw them in the river.

They might signal their presence to a sensitive and be redeemed.

I tried melting them with an electric filament. They barely became warm.

They cannot be hidden or destroyed. I must keep them near me, day and night. At least that will tell me when the attack's coming. The moment one of those men feels like killing me the crystals will tell me. No one must get them! I must keep them till I know what I have to do with them.

Oh, yes, I try getting the answer by a breakthrough. But something goes terribly wrong. I get an answer alright, a very definite one, an answer so monstrous—I cut it off, throw it out, for what it begins to tell me, if true, means I have gone stark, staring insane.

I never try it again.

I never want to think about it—never!

Once from my terrace I hear the apartment door open.

A voice says: 'Pardon me!' and the door closes again before I see who it is. By the time I have got up, the intruder has gone; but not before I am able to catch a very keen impression of disappointment. Whoever he may have been, he thought I'd be out of the place; he was annoyed and thwarted to find me there.

When I dare open my mind to people's thoughts I notice that each has its own particular colour or personality. Those of Widlow's men I can recognise a mile away. They have a kind of Global Oiliness, a self-satisfaction, a 'we-are-part-of-a-big-powerful-set-up' kind of thought, a condescension, an almost good-natured ruthlessness which has become quite familiar. I look for it now like a landmark. When I go out I say to myself: 'There's the boy, on the tail, as usual. Wonder what they'd like for lunch.' If I feel they'd like an expensive lunch (on the firm's account) I go to an expensive place and toy with some food, and I feel them emanating friendliness from their table, just out of sight, for I'm a right guy choosing their favourite eatery. If they annoy me I feel inclined to go to a drug-store, then they're not quite so pleased with me or their assignment.

Now, this intruder has nothing Global about him. His is a thin, sharp, glittering kind of thought, cold and impersonal. I felt it before but did not recognise it. I felt it when that car followed us back from Van Elb's Temple, and later followed Bob when I ducked out. I've felt it occasionally down in the streets; its thin coldness remotely familiar.

Once, long ago—very long ago, there was a thought like this; cold, cruel, glittering; an ambitious thought, dazzling and disastrous. Catastrophe followed this thought, worlds jarred, axes toppled, orbits shuddered, and my being here has something to do with that thought.

I report my intruder, and the hotel, with many, many apologies, move me to a new room facing the opposite direction. There is a terrace—I insist on a terrace—with an equally spectacular view towards the East River. I have not seen this section of the city before from this high place, and as I glance over the clustered towers one in particular calls my attention; a flat blue slab of a tower, the blue tower by the river I saw from the air, a tower which, for a fleeting second, seemed familiar as though once I knew its interior.

THAT'S IT. THAT'S THE ONE.

Again those people standing round a map. Minovsky's mountain ringed like an objective. Beside it an image of the blue tower and someone explaining something vital to the operation. Something must be done in this tower. The thing I have come to do.

.

Down in the lobby all is normal. From somewhere, I can't see where—behind a pillar, I think—comes the Global boys' recognition signal. But I haven't time to bother with them. They will follow me as always; it doesn't matter. The thin, sharp, cold one is there, too. When we get out in the street I notice he hasn't followed. At the time it doesn't seem important.

The walk is brisk and enjoyable. Now I am learning to control the thoughts, I can walk the streets without being swamped. By concentrating on my objective I can exclude anything. A brief check-up reveals the Global boys a block behind panting with exertion. I didn't know I could be such a swift walker. Never mind, boys, we'll see you get a good lunch for your pams. It's only three more blocks.

Suddenly the flat blue tower is at the end of the street.

Lawns and gardens appear by the river. A vast new building, steel, glass and white marble, all very familiar. Familiar doorway, familiar all the flagpoles. Then, all at once, all the vague doubts and fears vanish and the thing-I-have-to-do appears frighteningly near.

What is it? What is this place? I ask a passer-by.

'That's UNO.'

'UNO?'

'United Nations Building.'

United? . . . I have no sense of anything united.

Row upon row of identical windows, identical offices, identical muddle, futility, distrust; a structure charged with depression and baffled hopes, a machine rather than a building, a huge impersonal machine of strife and disunity. How can this be the place where it will happen?

Now that I have arrived at the place I am almost afraid to go further. Somewhere in those ant-shelves waits the person I came to see, the person who will give me the secret my mind rejected. I have only to cross the road, enter those doors, and I shall know.

The old unctuous feeling closes in. Global's boys are coming up behind me, watching, interested as to my intentions. They think I'm going to double-cross them, to give my secrets to someone here and put them beyond Widlow for ever. If I wait here they'll take action. So I hurry across the road and mingle with the people entering the building.

. . . An angular marble hall with galleries leading in all directions. Which way? Which way does it lie?

Widlow's men crossing the road. . . .

A group of people in the corner. Someone asking if I'd like the dollar conducted tour. . . .

'Yes! Yes, I would.'

Safe in this crowd. No one can harm me with so many people around. The best way to see the layout and explore the vast structure. A girl in pale blue uniform leads us away just in time. Widow's men have lost me in the confusion.

Down faceless white corridors and blind impersonal galleries. . . . Into a large chamber like a theatre where certain minor functionaries meet. . . . Into another chamber . . . other functions, other arguments. . . . The walls are permeated with the sadness of their thoughts. . . . Cleaning machines hum. . . . A man is testing microphones . . . 'one, two, three . . . testing, testing. . . .'

And now we move further into the building the sense of realisation grows . . . nearly there . . . coming nearer. . . . Those doors ahead of us. . . . In there . . . in there! That's where it is. . . .

'I'm sorry, sir. You can't go in there.' The girl puts out a restraining hand.

'That's closed today. They're getting it ready for the General Assembly to-morrow.'

'Mayn't I just look in?'

'Sorry, sir. The doors are locked. The cleaners and electricians are very busy getting it ready.'

So that's it . . . the general assembly . . . meeting to-morrow . . . Tomorrow is the day. . . . Tomorrow I shall go there and do the thing I came to do. . . .

I slip away from the sightseers and sit in the corridor concentrating on the chamber behind the locked doors. . . .

IT'S STARTING.

Like on the ship . . . the time Bunny came to my cabin . . . the same feeling . . . the feeling of going up . . . a soaring, rising, icy-cold vibration rushes through me and makes me larger than the assembly and the building . . . this tiny building fading into insignificance . . . rising,

rising up into the bright, vibrant spaces where for a blinding instant I know what it is I have to do. . . .

'Are you all right, sir?'

The girl, bending over me solicitously. . . . Her anxious face asking 'Do you feel all right? You looked pale.'

I am small. I am in the vast building. I am back upon the seat in the corridor of the building that is greater than I.

'I . . . felt faint. It's nothing to worry about.'

' . . . a drink of water?'

'Thank-you. I shall be all right. I'll take some air . . . I'm all right. Everything's all right Now.'

What do I have to do? What is that thing?

For a moment I knew, for a blazing instant it was clear in my mind, stretched out in perfect progression from its first inception to its final consummation. For less than a moment it was in time but not of time. I knew and I was that thing.

Now it has gone, once more my conscious mind has rejected it, shut it out, unable to withstand its enormity. It has gone and I am out in the street gazing up at the blind windows and the hard shiny cliff. A great glass wall shutting out the air, like the wall in my mind shutting out what it cannot bear to know.

Widlow's men are still inside, searching for me. They think I've given away my plans, fooled them, tricked mighty Widlow. When they catch up with me they will no longer be so amiable.

'Taxi!—Sherry Plaza, quick as you can!'

I have a few minutes start on them. Just time to rush back to the hotel, collect my few things and disappear.

Disappear where to?

Anywhere; a small hotel, a boarding house. Perhaps somewhere across the river in the suburbs. Anywhere I

can hide for the next twenty-four hours. After that it won't matter.

'Driver, have you a paper?'

A hand thrusts a paper back through the window.

'Are there any advertisements for lodgings?'

'Yeah. Turn to the classified section.'

A chaos of screaming produce meets my eyes; food, real estate, garments to make women look smaller, garments to make them look larger. Houses for sale, hotels . . .

TURN TO BACK PAGE OF THE NEWS SECTION.

What?

BACK PAGE.

For a lodging house?

BACK PAGE!

All right, all right! Back page news section. As I fold the page something seems to draw my eye down to the bottom. The words leap up at me.

'L.A. Victim to be interned to-day.'

For a moment it means nothing. Even the name Robert H. Whitling Jr., means nothing at first. It just says that Lt. Robert H. Whitling of the United States Navy was murdered while on furlough from Miramar Naval Air Base, San Diego, California. He was killed while alone in his sister's home in Los Angeles. The killer took nothing but some obsolete electronic equipment.

The F.B.I. believe the killer to be a mysterious English-looking visitor who had made friends with his sister. And the sister's name is Mrs Warren Radley. And the house of the killing is called 'The Lookout' in San Antonio Canyon.

Bob!

So it was Bob!

But why? How? Who would do such a thing?

Dazed and sickened, I read on. The killing took place in the early hours of Friday morning. The body has been flown to New York and is to be interred this afternoon in the family grave at Lobster Bay, Long Island. There's something about him being the only son of Mr and Mrs Robert D. Whitling of Pine Beach, Lobster Bay, but I can no longer see it. . . .

Early hours of the morning . . . that blow that struck us at Minovsky's place . . . that dread feeling . . . all the warnings I'd ignored. Not warnings for me but for Bob. Poor, poor little Bob!

Dimly I ask the driver where Long Island is.

'Cross the river.'

'And Lobster Bay?'

He doesn't know for sure, but he reckons it's around eighty miles.

'That cuts out any idea of driving straight there. All my money, my passport, my necessities are at the hotel. It will only take a minute to collect them. I don't sense Widlow's men around. I don't think they've left UNO yet.

'Get to the Sherry as quick as you can and wait for me.'

.

Normally I would have sensed danger as soon as I entered the lobby. I ask the clerk to give me my money, and he looks over my shoulder as if expecting to see someone. I fancy he gives a faint nod across the hall. But I could be mistaken. A moment later he hands me my money and my key, and once again glances across the lobby. As I turn I notice two men put down their papers and walk slowly towards me. Their studied amble and averted eyes—as if I was the last person to interest

them—make it perfectly clear what they want. I dash into a departing elevator, and the doors slam behind me.

Two men . . . I thought I glimpsed two others behind them in police uniform. Four altogether, two in plain clothes, two in uniform.

Why do they want me? What have I done? . . . Why should they wish to arrest me?

. . . Oh, yes, they intend to arrest me . . . I couldn't miss that. The moment I concentrated on them I received a scarlet flash of danger . . . nothing trivial . . . great danger . . . a hostile damning wave calling me a criminal . . . a wanted man . . . and from one comes a gloat, almost a self-righteous satisfaction at his vision of a man in a chair being electrocuted. . . .

MYSIII!

. . . They want to catch me, to kill me . . . to see me electrocuted . . . they will take me and lock me up and prepare a trial . . . a long, drawn-out trial for something I don't know and haven't done. . . .

Locked up like a caged animal. . . . Steel and concrete will prevent me doing it . . . the one thing that can end these thoughts of fear and agony . . . for ever. . . .

But they will stop me doing it.

The elevator stops at my floor. I get out, glance up and down the corridor. . . . It's empty. Glance at the indicator of the next car . . . Rising . . . rising . . . fourth, fifth, sixth . . . coming up . . . Their car . . . two uniformed armed men and the men in the slouch hats and raincoats . . . seventh, eighth, ninth . . . they will stop at my floor and come to my room.

My room lies directly across the corridor. . . . No time to go in and take anything. . . . Don't go in, or you'll be trapped . . . trapped and dragged away . . . never able to do the *thing*.

In the room! . . . someone in the room . . . men in there . . . hear them moving.

I reach my door. . . . Listen. . . . Someone in there . . . Several . . . throwing things around . . . furniture being moved, drawers pulled open . . . men searching my room . . . a sharp, thin cold thing . . . not police, not Global, but others . . . the thin cold ones are searching my room. . . . Don't go in. Don't.

Take the car down again. Go down quick!

Six elevators in a row. Punch all the 'Down' buttons.

The police elevator is still coming up. The cold ones are behind me. Coming out any minute. Caught between them and the police. Caught! Caught! No way out!

'Going down'

A light flashes . . . a car stops . . . door slides open . . . the same car I came up in. Never mind . . . police car is now at the twentieth floor and rising rapidly.

Get in! Get in! Don't let them catch you or everything will be lost.

The door closes behind me.

'Lobby, sir?'

'Yes, lobby, please. Quick as you can.'

. . . No, not lobby; the clerk will see you. They will be in your room by then; he will phone up. They will rush down and follow you. You'll have so little start over them. . . . Get off at the mezzanine!

'Mezzanine, please.'

The mezzanine includes a balcony running round the whole lobby. From this a small staircase goes down to rear entrance. If I keep well to the wall the clerk cannot see me if he looks up.

No.

Don't leave the balcony; move round to the other side where you can see the elevators without being seen from

the desk. Let them all think I've fled, so they'll rush after me into the street. . . . Give them time to get away, then leave by the rear door in Fifty-Eight Street.

But they do not come down.

Soon, four more policemen arrive in a hurry . . . running to the nearest elevator. . . . Probably others are outside watching the building.

Get out . . . get out quickly. Every moment here reduces your chances of getting away. . . . Get out!

Then, just as I am about to go, an elevator opens, discharging the policemen, and with them, two men—dishevelled men; dishevelled as if from struggling. Two men, angry, baffled, handcuffed.

And one of the men is the man who's been following me.

Focus! Focus on them quickly. . . . Pierce their minds. . . . Find what happened. . . .

. . . A search . . . these two men searching a room . . . searching my room . . . throwing things around . . . looking for something. . . . Those noises I heard through from outside. . . . See it plainly now. . . . Then police open the door, rush in expecting to find me, but find instead the men who have been following me . . . catch them in the act . . . the thin cold ones.

Now, leave quickly before they guess you're still hiding in the building. . . . Get out before others come down. . . .

Down the little stairs, across the passage, and out the back entrance onto Fifty-Eight Street. A patrol car, its red light still flashing. Two more police lounging on the sidewalk. . . . Mingle with the crowd, walk past the car. Walk away towards Fifth Avenue.

No, they haven't noticed. . . . Sense the police outside haven't heard about my trick. Upstairs they are still searching.

In Fifth Avenue, the wall closes in . . . the screening wall of hurried thoughts and hurrying people . . . The big stores and the jewellers, and the little linen shops that always seem to be having sales, the slow snorting buses and the immobile, hooting traffic.

Immobile cars, immobile taxis . . . waves of frustration and temper and futility . . .

Empty taxi. . . .

'How long would it take to get to Lobster Bay?'

'Nearly two hours, if I take the Parkway. But you'll have to pay my return fare.'

'That's all right.'

'I'll have to stop for gas.'

'Not here. Get over the river first.'

'I haven't had my dinner, either.'

'Never mind. I must get to Lobster Bay by three—a friend's funeral.'

'Oh, O.K.'

.

After a long drive we arrive at Lobster Bay. A few enquiries lead us to a long low pleasant house overlooking the sea.

'There's no one here. They're all down at the church', says the man who answers our ringing. 'You can't miss it. Just down the road.'

Rows of cars parked all along the lane, and at the end of it, a small dark building with mournful pointed windows and a prim spiky tower, a place of worship of some kind, suggesting ideas as narrow as its windows.

Four men in tall black hats and long black coats are laughing at some private joke as I arrive. On seeing me their smiles and cigarettes vanish to be replaced with a

kind of dead expression, an official mask of pious woe which I feel they have been hired to adopt.

It is dark inside, dark and damp and smelling of frowst, for the windows are never opened and the door opened but seldom, to keep out the light and fresh air. Inside there are rows of hard wooden seats facing a raised platform on which they have put a long narrow box and draped it in black and covered it with flowers. In front stands a man in black and white robes reading from a small black book. He is reading to the black-clothed people sitting on the benches. But few are listening; they sit wrapped in their melancholy; hopeless and afraid, some even secretly glad—glad that it's happened to someone else, to Bob, not to them—'I'm glad it hasn't happened to me. Glad Bob Whitling's dead, not I. Glad that I'm alive and he's dead.'

That's what some of them are thinking.

They are thinking of the thing in the box under the flowers, the empty thing, the shell that once knew Bob. A vague grey depression of fear and sorrow wells out from them to mingle with the frowstiness, filling the whole building with its gloom.

I can see Selma up in front, her flame hair hidden by a small black hat, and next to her sits Warren. Not the Warren I knew but a Warren hideously disfigured. Not a physical disfigurement but a mental one. Oh, yes, it's no fun this business of seeing other people's thoughts. That's what it's come to in the last few days; first a knowing, now an actual seeing. Pale images like reflections. Pale when you're out of doors, but here in the gloom they appear stronger. Indoors they have shape and colour, vivid as the sunset on a window. Depressing, drab, coiling things writhing around the chapel. But from Warren come the worst—an ugly lurid smouldering

hatred. He hates the man who killed Bob. He would gladly kill him if he could. I can see his thoughts very plainly, and I fear what I see.

For the man he wishes to kill is myself.

No mistaking that image. The sheer intensity of his desire has put me in that death-box instead of Bob.

SEARCH.

FIND WHY HE WISHES THIS.

. . . So confused. So much hate. . . . Dark writhing images. Nothing positive. Only hate.

YOU WERE THE LAST PERSON TO SEE BOB ALIVE.

. . . What if I was?

. . . But that's impossible! He doesn't—He couldn't—He couldn't think *that*!

BUT HE DOES.

. . . No one in his senses . . .

HE'S NO LONGER IN HIS SENSES.

. . . What shall I do? How can I help him?

WHY DO YOU THINK YOU SENT YOURSELF HERE?

. . . To help them. When I found out. I had to help them.

THEN DO SO.

. . . But how . . . *How?*

YOU WILL KNOW HOW.

. . . I wish I did.

YOU WILL KNOW WHEN THE TIME COMES.

. . . Yes, I shall know at the right time.

LOOK AT BOB'S MOTHER.

That white-haired lady by Selina? The one who looks like her?

BOB'S MOTHER.

. . . She's different. From her comes a deep stillness, like bands of light, curving wing-like to meet in a point high above her head. I have seen that form before; somewhere,

long ago, I saw light like this, mounting as in the form of great wings. Somewhere, some time, on a morning long ago, I remember vast wing-like structures when the light was young and everything was fresh and new.

THEN YOU KNOW WHO SHE IS.

Yes, I know. Somewhere . . . some place . . . I know . . .

The man with the book begins to mumble. His job is to convince them that the thing in the box that was Bob is not dead but alive. Or rather, from what I can distinguish from his mind, will be alive again one day. In the jumble of his thoughts he begins to build an image. The world is nearing its end and he thinks he sees a trumpet blowing. As it blows the perished box opens and the mildewed bones struggle back to form and life to stand trembling before a dreadful old being with a long white beard. Bob's crimes and virtues are read out, the balance weighed and Bob—a sickly, grinning image of Bob—floats up into the sky twanging some kind of musical instrument. That's what the man in black and white thinks will happen to him, and to everyone. He talks repetitiously about eternal life without the faintest conception of what it means.

You would learn something of Life, little man, if you opened the windows and let some fresh air blow through your tiny soul—Life, my friend, is.

When he has finished mumbling they sing a song. Then the men outside with tall hats put out their cigarettes and come in to take Bob away. They lift up the box, carry it slowly outside, and the family follow in a lingering shuffle.

Warren and Selina are approaching. I step towards them.

NOT NOW! NOT NOW!

. . . But they've seen me . . .

NOT YET THE TIME.

... Too late. They've seen me.

'Warren?'

'You! ——'

Glazed eyes, a film rolling off them, a glaring hatred, bewilderment, a look I have never seen in human eyes, and never wish to see again. A quick stride and he confronts me:

'You? ——'

'I came as soon as I heard.'

'Filthy killer! You filthy, filthy, stinking, murdering bastard!'

He has taken my arm in a grip behind my back and I know he will break it if I resist him.

His breath comes in my ear. 'Why come here? Why come?'

'I'll explain when you're calmer.'

'You bet you'll explain! You'll explain! Huh! You'll explain!'

'Warren', comes a soft voice: 'You're holding up the procession!'

'Mother! This is—D'you know who this is?'

'Quiet, dear. Tell us afterwards!'

'But, Mother . . .'

Firmly the old lady pushes him ahead and the procession continues, none the wiser for the interruption, Warren still holding me close to his side, mumbling incoherently and threatening to kill me if I try to escape. I catch a glimpse of Selina's agonised inquiring eyes. I smile at her but she turns away. Behind us I see her mother. She gives me a faint smile and a nod, then she taps Warren with her stick as a sign to keep what he has to say till later.

Together we step through a garden of stones and ugly

monuments to a large granite cross with the words: '*Whitling Family*' carved on its massive base. The men with tall black hats put down the box over a freshly dug hole and the little man with the book begins reading again. Now they are going to return Bob's body to parent Earth, but they have built the box of good stout wood as though they begrudge the mother taking back what is her own. It isn't what I'd expected at all. Why should they seek to delay the paying? Why don't they know that Earth lent her substance to give brief anchorage to the timeless spirit that she might become richer at his passing, and the spirit wiser at its going? Why don't they know that? I thought everyone knew. I know—I've always known. I know birth and death and rebirth as I know the passage of the nights and the days.

But *they* fear death terribly, almost as much as they fear life. They hate giving the remains to the ground, so the box has been fitted with everything possible to avoid decay. Their thoughts are down there in the hole trying to drag back what is no longer Bob, desperately, like foolish men trying to pull back the sea after the ebb tide has left the beach. Only one among them has no despair; that is the mother. For she has long known the seasons of the spirit, and she understands. Quietly, and because custom insists, she steps forward and sprinkles earth on the box lid, quietly and without resentment, for she has left fear far behind her and become her own light.

As the earth is patted down Warren's grip tightens and he mutters close in my ear: 'Why?—Why did you do it?'

'You think I killed Bob.'

'Who else?'

'I don't know who else. But it was not I.'

'Tell that to the cops—you filthy Commie!'

He swallows hard and looks back at the fresh grave. There is nothing I can do to ease his pain.

But he mustn't call the police. Whatever happens, he mustn't do that.

'Warren, we will find Bob's killer and he will account for it. But you mustn't hate so. Please stop hating.'

All he answers is: 'Hell!'

Still locked in his grip I am marched back to the house by the sea where a sombre little party is taking place. People stand in whispering groups, and poker-faced servants glide about offering refreshments. Now that we are in the house Warren begins to feel awkward. Enquiring glances and whispered comments make him feel that it's distinctly odd to be clutching a guest in this manner.

'O.K., Mr Jones, let's get it over with.' He signs to a servant and whispers: 'Will you go and phone the cops? Tell them to come here and pick up a killer.'

'Killer? Gee!' The man's eyes pop.

'Well, jump to it!'

'Sure thing!'

'Don't call the police! Anything, but not that!'

'Why are you so worried, if you're not guilty? Cops don't worry innocent men.'

'I didn't kill Bob. I was with Elias Minovsky out on Mount Ramolap at the time of his death. I can soon prove that.'

'O.K., O.K. Then you don't have to worry, do you?'

'It isn't that. If they take me away and lock me up—only for a few days—everything will be spoiled. I have to be somewhere tomorrow; somewhere desperately important. I just can't spend tomorrow sitting in a cell.'

'If you're innocent, you won't.'

'How can I prove that now? It will take days.'

He closes the door behind him and locks it.

'Look, Mr Jones, or whatever your real name is. I wasn't born yesterday. I know who you're working for, and the F.B.I. know. All I want to know is why the goddam hell did you have to kill Bob? That kid never hurt you. Why did you do it? Why? Why? Why?' He pushes me into a chair.

'I suppose human life means nothing to you people: Anyone stands in your way, strike him down, eliminate him. Crush him. Don't let anything stop you getting what you're after. But you needn't have bothered I suppose you didn't know that stuff was useless? For your information, it was all declassified last month, else why the hell do you think I had it in the house?'

'I can't follow you. Please explain.'

'Don't make me laugh!'

'You didn't know that was junked equipment, did you?'

'What was?'

'But you had to kill Bob for it.'

'What equipment?' I shout.

'The stuff I'd brought back from the labs and locked in Bob's closet. I was going to use some of it in my ham radio. That's all. But you wait till we're all safely out of the house, then you pick the lock and think you've found something real precious. But Bob comes home early, surprises you in the act, so you kill him, strike him down like he was a dog.'

'Is that what you really believe?'

'I believe it and the F.B.I. believe it.'

'Why?'

'Do I have to tell you?'

'No, just sit quiet a minute. Sit quiet, I'll get it straighter that way.'

Out of his tangled mess of thoughts I'm beginning to

get pictures. 'The Lookout' silent and deserted, a shadow moving through the house, a flashlight, a cupboard opening, things being taken out. A car coming up the hill, Bob entering silently, surprising the nameless figure, a hand flung out for protection, a brutal thud and something lying on the floor, blood pouring from a gaping head—Bob's head.

Confusion and screaming sirens and oh-so-clever detective finding the easy explanation—Stranger follows Warren on to the plane, sits down beside him, makes friends with him, cleverly persuades him to invite him home. Stranger has phoney British accent, is enemy agent; knows Warren is doing important work on highly secret electronic projects. Dupes the whole family, and leaves with some valueless equipment from the laboratory where Warren works. Idiot-detective-mind so certain that stranger is myself, and makes such a convincing case that even Warren, numbed with shock, begins to believe it and, later, is sure that it is I who have killed Selina's brother. It's all cut and dried, so obvious; easy.

There is a tap on the door.

'Who's that?'

'Only I.'

A gentle voice, like Selina's only more mature.

'I can't come out now!'

'Then please let me in.'

He looks undecided.

'Warren! Let me in!'

'Oh, all right.' He rises, looks at me doubtfully. 'Don't try anything; just don't try anything.'

He goes to the door, admitting the old lady, and locks it quickly behind her. She comes to me, smiling.

'I'm Bob's mother.'

'Yes, I know. I'm deeply sorry.'

'Poor Bob. He had so much to live for. I—I wish I understood these things better.'

'Mother, do you know who this is?'

'Oh, yes.'

'But it's the guy who killed him.'

'Oh, you silly boy! Sit down and stop making a fool of yourself.'

'But this is the man the F.B.I. are looking for. He's an enemy agent.'

'Yes, dear. Would you bring me that ashtray? I'm dying for a cigarette—I do you smoke, Mr—er—'

'Lutterworth.'

'Mr Lutterworth.'

'If you do, I may as well.'

She takes a filter cigarette from a small gold case and puts it very deliberately in a thin black holder. Her hands look surprisingly strong for such a frail delicate woman, but they are trembling so much she can hardly fit it in the holder. Catching my eye, she says 'It does help steady the nerves.—I think we could all do with a drink. Warren, would you see if you can't find us a stiff whisky?'

'And leave you alone with him?'

'I should like that very much.'

'But he's a killer. He's dangerous, I tell you.'

She gives a frail sigh and attempts to rise 'Then I suppose I shall have to get it myself.'

Warren capitulates. 'Oh, very well—But I'm not letting either of you out of my sight. I'm leaving this door wide open—like this—See.'

'As you wish.'

As soon as Warren has gone she draws her chair forward, bringing her face near mine and for several moments studies me intently.

'Yes—yes; it is you?'

Her remark seems quite natural; nothing to do with a wandering mind overwrought by grief.

'I always thought you'd come here one day, but not quite like this—not on quite such a sad—a sad—I had another boy, you know. Clayton. Then there was Selina. Clayton died of polio. Now Bob's gone there's only Selina—only Selina.'

She pulls herself together with a brave effort. 'What am I talking about?' She gives me another searching look. 'I knew you'd come! Seeing you in church there today. It was—it was like a sign. A sign that everything's going to be all right. It's going to be all right now that you've come.'

Before I can question her, she says: 'Please don't think me very foolish, but I know you. I've known you since I was a little girl.'

'Known me?'

'Through the dream. Whenever something important happens I always have that wonderful strange dream. You're always in it—You've always been in it, longer than I can remember. The last time was the night before Selina called me from New York to say she's met a wonderful man named Warren and was going to marry him. That was the time you said to me: "When we meet again it won't be in this place but in your home".'

'You mean I am always in this dream?'

'Yes—' sadly. 'But I thought you knew.'

'You're no stranger to me, Mrs Whitling. Even when I first saw you in the church there was something familiar around you—a colour, a suggestion of past shapes.'

She laughs faintly. 'I've never dared tell this to anyone. They'd think me mad. I'm meant to be the practical business member of the family.' Then, taking my hand,

she asks urgently, softly: 'Where else have we met before?
—Do you know?'

I shake my head.

'It wasn't here?'

'No. It wasn't here. It wasn't even in what we would call time.'

'But I've known you longer even than I've known Bob.'

Again I glimpse those wing-like structures in a crystal immensity, vast beyond measuring. That was before the Thought, before the cold, glittering, devastating Thought was born. But after the Thought there were shadows under the rayed white wings; shadows of the proud high Thought that brought back the old darkness.

Warren has returned and is clinking ice into tumblers and making gassy noises with a syphon.

'Oh, Warren, how kind of you. Do you like soda, Mr Lutterworth?'

The clinking stops. 'Oh, so now he calls himself Lutterworth, does he? When I last met him it was Jones.'

'Does it matter what he calls himself? What are names, anyway? Only labels.'

'Well, it's very suspicious.'

'He didn't kill Bob, you know.'

'I don't know anything of the sort. Maybe he did. Maybe he didn't. The cops will soon find out!'

'But *he* didn't kill him.' She jabs a finger at me. 'He had nothing to do with it! He's not to blame in any way.'

'Who said I wasn't?'

'Well, are—you?'

'Perhaps I am.'

She starts to protest, but Warren silences her.

'Let *him* talk. It's about time he told his story.'

'I should never have let them follow Bob back to the "Lookout". That's where I was to blame—fool that I

was for not seeing it at the time . . . Bob and I were being tailed back across the Desert from the Van Elb Temple, so, to give them the slip, I dropped out of the car at an intersection, leaving them to chase Bob. Oh, I should have known better! Everything tried to warn me of the danger. The first time—that first time I hesitated on your threshold, Warren, and you pushed me inside—everything in me told me to turn back. Then, when I was up on the mountain with Minovsky, about one or two in the morning, something hit us like a blow. We both felt it. Both knew something dreadful had happened.'

'I don't follow any of this', says Warren.

'What I'm trying to make clear to you is that they thought Bob was me. They struck him in the dark and thought they'd finished me. Then they took this equipment, whatever it was, thinking it was mine. Bob gave his life and I was spared. That's all it amounts to. Bob died, and because he died, I am alive today. I don't blame you if you hate me for that. But don't, *don't* throw it all away by stopping me now. If you do, Bob will have died for nothing.'

Mrs Whitling stubs out her cigarette. 'I only wish I could understand these things a little better.—They seem so cruel, so pointless. But—but, if there was some reason for Bob going—perhaps I shan't mind so much.'

Only then, as I catch a glimpse of her thoughts, do I realise the suffering she conceals beneath an outward gentleness.

Warren interrupts: 'Well, who are these creatures? Let's get the cops onto them, and quick!'

'I don't know who they are. There's something cold and dedicated about them. They don't think like you do; and they'll stop at nothing to get what they're after.'

'Obviously Commie agents!'

'Then', says Mrs Whitling: 'We've got to protect you from them, too.'

'Let the F.B.I. and the cops deal with it, Mother. I'm still not sure this guy's telling the truth.'

'Then no amount of arguing will make any difference', she retorts with a sudden sharpness. 'You either know truth when you see it, or you don't. And this man's telling the truth!'

'What do you know about him?'

'More than you think.'

'But you've never seen him before!'

'That's just where you're mistaken.'

'But you can't have done. It's not possible.'

She is positive and emphatic. 'I've seen him many times, and we've known each other a long time.'

Warren is dumbfounded. He mumbles something, asks her why she didn't tell him so earlier; then gives up altogether.

I am hardly less surprised myself. Here, at last perhaps, is one who will help me, provide the missing key to what has to be done tomorrow.

'Mrs Whitling?'

'Yes.'

'Do you also know why I have come here?'

She smiles. 'Of course.'

'Why?'

'Well, I can only use your own words, the words you've always used to answer my question.'

'What are those words?'

'You said you would come one day to make the Great Change; that's what you said. You also said I should live to see that change. That's all you said—ever.'

'What's that noise?'

'You look disappointed, Mr Lutterworth. Have I said

something wrong? Did I say something I shouldn't? Oh, please forgive me. Have I forgotten something?

'No—no, Mrs Whitling; it's I who've forgotten something.'

.

Again from far away I hear a horrid sound, a distant wailing moan rising to a shriek.

'What's that beastly noise?'

'I can't hear anything', Warren replies.

Familiar noise. I've heard it before, once in Los Angeles, several times in New York. I meant to ask what it was, but never did.

'Listen, it's growing louder.'

'Nothing.'

'It's still far away, but surely you can hear it?'

He listens carefully for several seconds, then springs up in great agitation.

'It's a siren!—The cops are coming!'

Mrs Whitling stares at him calmly: 'As you called them, it is hardly remarkable. I must say, though, they've been an unconscionable time a'coming.'

'What are we going to do?'

'Leave them to me. I'll tell the captain one of our guests got hysterical, had too much to drink, and rang them without my consent. And as for you—' She turns to me with a sad smile—'You can go out through the back. Go down the garden and through the wood. That will take you to the railroad station where you can get a train to New York. I'll keep the police occupied.'

'But don't get yourself into trouble for me. I'm a wanted man.'

'Believe me, I can deal with such minor horrors as the

police—the greater horrors I leave to you. Hurry now, you haven't much time.'

As I leave, I heard her remarking: 'Just like rowdy children. Why they have to make all that noise and warn their man they're coming, I've never been able 'to fathom!'

As I disappear into the trees beyond the garden the wailing sirens grind down to a low buzzing moan, and I almost regret not being there to watch the amazing old lady dealing with her intruders. I keep on, straight through the wood, climb a fence, cross a field, climb another fence, and find myself unexpectedly back in the place where they have just buried Bob. The footprints are still fresh in the grass and the smell of newly turned earth hangs heavily in the rainy air. As I approach the grave the Whiting cross stands directly in my path, looming enormous and dark against the yellow evening sky, like a creature rising up, blocking my way.

But it isn't the cross that is rising, it is I. Before I can do anything to prevent it, I am being swept away by that enormous terrifying feeling of expanding . . . of being everywhere and nowhere . . . I try to hold myself down and keep walking, but I can't, for there's no longer anything to walk on nor any 'I' to walk on it. It and I are just part of one immense blue void, a void more real, more solid than any real thing you think you know. There's nothing I can do about it. It's happened and I can't stop it.

Then, in this state of being everywhere and nowhere, I begin to sense a single form, a fine bright thread coming up from under the earth. One end is deep in the ground, at the other end something is dragging, something like a frightened, caught bird struggling to free itself. Yet the bird has no visible form because I am no longer able to use my body's eyes.

I sense, rather than see, a bright eager face and catch a familiar enthusiastic laugh. Suddenly the laugh is cut off and the brightness leaves the face. I cannot actually see the face, but I recognise it and know it is trying to ask me a question.

Why?

Why?

Why?

That's all it asks. It wants to know, for it does not understand why it is suddenly here. Short moments ago in its memory it was in a house on the top of a hill, standing in a passage. Then suddenly it was surrounded by people, some it knew, some were strangers. People weeping, and a body it knew being bundled into a box, then into the earth, and no one able to hear him, no one to speak to—to answer his question.

Why?

Why?

Why?

It is like someone asleep who wants to wake up. But he can't wake up because he has nothing to wake up to.

But even as I try to speak to him the thread breaks and there is tremendous stillness. The face and the questioning sink into the all-embracing blueness, that's the only way I can describe it, as a radiant blueness that the body-eye could never see nor the body-mind imagine, a blueness so beautiful and vast that I long to plunge and pass through it with Bob to what lies beyond.

Now he is asleep and floating in its stillness, like a tiny sleeping point of light.

But this point of light is not absorbed by desire into the blueness to what lies beyond. But a greater desire, the desire to return and finish what was cut off ahead of time, keeps it floating, waiting, protected by sleep, a tiny fleck

in an infinite ocean waiting to be cast back upon the shore.

Now I am looking at the trampled grass, aware once more of the new turned-earth and the fresh evening smells that follow the rain. I am back here on the grass in the world I have taken to be real, feeling tired and very small and rather afraid at the things that are happening to me.

But even now, something's not quite right.

I didn't come back; I was pulled back. Some will, other than my own, dragged me back. Something was there when I wanted to plunge eternally into the blueness, and willed me to return. Whatever it was, it has not left me with my hallucination. (Hallucination it must have been. People simply don't go around seeing things like that!) It is still here . . . behind me, to be precise . . . yes, emanating from a slight distance . . . from somewhere over there . . . from those trees . . . Two tall dark trees . . . something beneath them drawing me, willing me towards them . . . something stronger than anything as yet . . . something powerful . . . big . . . frightening . . .

Absurd! A lot of stupid imaginings! How the hell can two trees wish anything? I'm just over-tired and emotionally upset. The balance of my mind is being upset. I'd better be damn careful. Get away quickly. Have a rest. Find somewhere to hide and sleep . . . above all to sleep . . . and be ready for what tomorrow will bring.

So look here, John Lutterworth: I am turning my back on those stupid trees and walking away.

That's it.

That's fine . . . fine! We're nearly at the fence . . . nearly there . . .

But I *am* walking away. I am! I AM! . . .

Damn it! I am! I'm getting nearer with each step.

Don't panic. It only seems my legs aren't carrying me . . . It only seems they're turning me round and walking me back to the trees. They're not really; they're taking me to the fence . . . A few steps now and I'll be at . . .

: . . the Trees!

Oh, God, help me!

. . . I can barely stop. I want to run, to rush to them, to fly into their power. That blue thing was nothing for making me want to give up my will. I want to rush into the tall trees and give myself utterly and completely to the thing that wants me . . . I'm going . . . going . . . can't stop . . .

I fling out an arm, grab a creeper round a monument . . . something catches my foot . . . I trip up, sprawl . . .

For a moment I am saved.

When I dare look up, and look towards the trees, for the first time I see *them*.

Two shadows, two faint figures, two beings of immense silent power, watching me from under the shadows, willing me to come to them.

Then they begin to move. Arms extended, they glide towards me, arms open to embrace me; slowly they advance, slowly lest I should take fright and run away. Out of the shadows they come, silently willing me. They want me to surrender to them, to go to them, to learn from them *the most terrible thing in the world*.

. . . No. No, not that. Not that. Not that.

They concentrate. They mean me to come to them. The power of their minds closes round me and I am drowning, helpless, lost in the awful intensity of their wills.

. . . No! . . . No! Use your head. Don't panic! Don't panic! Keep calm and defy them. They can't hurt you if you use your power properly . . .

Will them! Will them! Concentrate. Project all the energy you can summon . . . make them go away.

Do not come nearer. Do not come nearer.

Concentrate upon them. Put up a barrier. Weave a bleak impenetrable wall around yourself . . . Will it! Desire it! Hold it in being. . . .

They've stopped. They're waiting.

But now they're trying new tactics . . . They're beseeching, imploring . . . trying to break through . . .

Go back. Leave me alone. I will you to leave me alone.

My will is more powerful than yours. Go! Go! GO!

But they are strong and cunning. A powerful wave of desire swamps over me. They try to make me *want* to know them. They're trying to break me down. But they shan't. I'm stronger. The crystals make me stronger.

Leave . . . Go away . . . Never return . . .

I hold it. I hold that thought. Concentrate it upon them like a destroying flame. Hold it.

Hold it!

At last. . . .

They're going to turn around and walk slowly away, leaving me alone. I have dispelled the attack, just as I shall dispel any others.

But even as my defences drop—for it is insufferable effort to maintain them at length—I feel a wave of infinite sadness and wonder from a source I suspect to be these new and particularly subtle enemies.

It is their last trick, an insiduously clever trick to get behind my will and make me *want* to follow them. But it doesn't fool me. You think you can catch me like this, but you can't.

No, not I, not I. You can't fool me. You thought you could trap me, but you can't . . . Not I. Not I. . . .

.

The friendly lights of the station are in sight now, and on the platform there's people—friendly people. And a cheerful little man says there's a train to New York City in five minutes and am I English, and so what do you know, he married an English girl, and he's been to London, and London's a great city. I could gladly fall round his neck and kiss him.

I get in the coach with him and listen to his talk for a time, for it's good, friendly, simple talk and it's doing much for me. He's a good kind little man, and all of a sudden I see him not as a little man but as all the men I'm going to do *the thing* for tomorrow—if only I can get through till tomorrow.

He doesn't expect answers, he just likes to talk. So, bit by bit, I find my mind clearing, free to examine the situation with less fear.

'Would you like to try a cigar?'

'Thanks. May as well.'

'Yep, I sure like your old London. I plan to be going there again one day. I'd like to look you up, if I may.'

'Keep talking, sir. Keep talking.'

Then we plunge deep into a tunnel and come out in Pennsylvania Station.

Somewhere in the throng I lose my little man. I would like to have stayed with him, for he is warm and comforting and I need someone to keep me company through the night that is to come. But he is gone and I don't see him anywhere.

Then, as I am approaching the escalators on the concourse I see them.

They are waiting by a column, waiting for me because they knew I would be coming this way and no other, waiting for me . . . the two figures under the trees . . .

Not agents of a foreign power, not police, not any-

thing I have sensed before. More dangerous, more terrible than any enemy, these. They knew I was coming and they awaited me. They do not hate, they do not fear, they just know. They know everything about me. They pierce into my brain and begin drawing me towards them . . .

No . . . No . . . Not you. I won't. I won't . . . I won't come. I WON'T.

I turn again and begin to run but my steps drag slow, like trying to run in a dream; my legs turn to lead and I feel them drawing me towards their insidious wills.

Oh, it is wicked. No force, no terror, no desire to possess me, only instead a longing, appealing, a desperate appealing to me, to the part of me they know cannot refuse. They are at their tricks again, their terrible siren tricks.

But I'm up to them. I know what they want. They want me to give them the things in my pocket. They are using powers of the mind above my understanding to make me come up to them and give them the most precious thing in the world.

I'm not deceived. No, I'm not going to be taken in by you . . . Never . . . I look, I can walk again, my legs are moving. I'm running. I'm getting away from you. What I've got to do is the greatest thing in history, and you're not going to prevent me. I'm leaving the station. I'm getting into a cab . . . I'm driving away . . . away, away from you. . . .

Suddenly it goes off. Like a light, like a blown fuse. They have expended their power. Now it has gone, burned out—useless. I am free.

'O.K. then, Bud. Where to?'

'Anywhere. Just keep driving.'

'Anywhere particular?'

'Take me to a restaurant—somewhere a good way from here—any kind: a cafeteria will do.'

... That's all right. They're not following. I'm watching closely through the back window, but no car has kept on our tail for more than a few blocks. I had a good head start on them. By the time they reached the street I was already in the cab and away. That's got rid of them ... We are driving away and I am safe once more ... Seventh Avenue is full of people and traffic and silly friendly neon lights, and all the places are open, the strident noisy cafeterias, the movie-houses, the flashing blaring sky-guns, the dear human friendly noisy good people; I am always safe with people.

.

'It's two bucks' worth, Bud. D'you want to go any further? If not, there's a good place on the next corner. It's fine for "burgers".'

'Yes, drop me here then. Thank-you.'

Could do with some food. Long time since I've eaten.

... Nice place: clean and pleasant lighting.

As I push through the door and make for an empty booth, two figures rise from a corner table and come towards me.

They knew ... They knew in advance where I was going. They knew, even though it was the driver's idea to drop me off at this place. They knew; they'd got there before me and had sat down quietly waiting ... waiting ...

As I reach the door they go for me. I see their eyes and I know what they want. Terrible to know what they want.

When I yell they stop and the power stops and I don't seem able to see them any more, until I am out and running down the street—running with all the strength in me, running and running until I see a policeman

swinging his club, then I slow down and walk to avoid making him suspicious. But they keep right after me, not running, not hurrying, just walking, walking always about a block to the rear. Now I am at the corner of Madison and Forty Second and they are still there. Sometimes I don't see them; others get in the way, but I always know they're there and if I run a couple of blocks, when I turn round they're still exactly one block behind, not running, just walking.

But they've stopped trying to will me down. They've given up that awful clutching at my mind and making me want—want as if it isn't my will any more—to stop running and go up to them and get it over. They've stopped that, which is a blessed relief. Now they're trying it the slow way; they're just going to go on trailing me, always one block behind, until I can't go any further and will give in to them.

It's time I tried something different.

So I turn up Forty Second to Grand Central where there'll be plenty of people. I try to lose them on the concourse and take the subway shuttle across to Times Square. I climb out of the train at Times, and mingle with the crowds on the platform.

.

They are on the stairs waiting for me. I half knew they would be there, even before I'd seen them. They are waiting for me because they knew I would take *this* train, get off at *this* station, and head towards this particular exit.

They knew and they are waiting.

But I'm up to them again. As soon as I see them, I turn and walk firmly away.

Then it begins.

At first it is hardly noticeable, indistinguishable from the hurry and movement all around me and the general welter of excluded thoughts tapping faintly on the periphery for admission. I hardly notice it as distinct from the mass-thought-wave until I have gained the street.

It is like a probe at first, a gentle probing motion, something sharp, quiet and insistent exploring round my mind, seeking a weakly defended point. It circles me with a gentle, almost caressing motion, as if it has no wish to alarm, to lull me into a false security, to move discreetly and not arouse suspicion.

It probes and feels and pauses. It moves round, then pauses again. Then, when it thinks I have noticed it, it resumes the regular massaging motion, soothing, not wishing to alarm, probing, coiling; it feels deeper into the outer portions of my consciousness, as yet making no violent movement. Round and round, this way and that way, increasing in power, preparing, bunching, coiling, poised ready.

Then it is still. For a moment I think it has been withdrawn, for all movement has ceased as a serpent is motionless the instant before striking. I brace my mind, tense it, slam great doors against the coming horror.

It strikes.

Sensing my resistance it strikes, hurriedly and with all its power. Like a hot skewer driven into the brain it pierces the shrivelling periphery, a blinding shooting, stabbing, seething, blazing agony . . . in another instant my mind is to be annihilated.

As suddenly as it struck it withdraws, leaving me weak and gasping and clutching my tortured head and staggering, tripping and butting into someone, and 'Hey, are you drunk?' and 'Watch where you're going' and all the pale, bloated faces looking down into me, into the sea of

writhing orange fire that was me, and is now only a vortex of shrieking sound and discordant line and whirling lights and receding pain.

Pain receding as through a long tunnel, receding . . . receding . . . receding . . . receding. . .

Everything very tiny now.

Tiny me in a tiny subway station.

All very far away.

Remote and Unreal

And the pain receding and the orange-blue swirling fire dying out and things taking back their normal shape and size, and people getting in the way and things looking better and the right shape, and things better able to stand upright and no pain any more

They have left me alone. The people who thought I was drunk have left me alone. Someone is filling a cardboard cup at a Coca-Cola machine. I see that very clearly. He is filling a cup and now he is drinking it. He is using his left arm and he is drinking with no expression on his face.

That isn't of the least importance really, but I follow it carefully in every detail, so I can tell myself that my mind is untouched.

I am quite whole. They haven't hurt me as I am able to see everything perfectly clearly and to think without any change. The man has finished his coca-cola and has thrown the cardboard cup into the receptacle and has gone away.

That I know, and something else far more important. I can feel it, like a solid steel sphere encompassing me. There is now an impermeable defence around me which no one—not even they—can penetrate. Their attack has had an unexpected effect. Instead of burning an opening into my inner being it had produced instead a cautery effect, and hardened the shell and fused the point of entry into a

shield that is now impenetrable. They have defeated their own ends. I have won. I have triumphed and nothing now can prevent me doing the thing.

They have played their strongest move. They tried to take me by force, to destroy my mind and bond me as an automaton, but they have only succeeded in making me stronger.

Oh, yes, they are still following, but at a respectful distance. They will go on following, all through the night. Wherever I go they will follow, sometimes waiting for me ahead of time, sometimes dropping behind so that for long moments I am not aware of them, for I do not try to keep a feel on them now. I could, I know, reach out and probe their minds, demand who they are, where they have come from, what they want of me (as if I didn't know) and force an answer. I could grapple with their minds for control. Maybe I should win, should prove myself more powerful than they, should be able to turn them, as in the cemetery, and send them on their way never again to molest me. But to enter those unknown lands, to challenge their defences and, having entered, to battle them in their strange and terrible mind-world, whatever my chances of victory, is a final risk I dare not take. What alien forces should I find within that appear not from the surface what hidden traps and monstrous creations of power exceeding all estimation? No, do not even think of them lest I give them an opening once again.

Indeed, this could be another snare. They may want me to try and penetrate them, I think I should be victor and then, having lured me from my new impregnable fortress, the sweet-sounding lurking sirens will become fanged monsters and rend me. They are using guile now that force has failed.

So now it is just a question of keeping ahead of them and lasting out the night.

But they haven't finished with you. Oh, no; don't fool yourself. They haven't finished. They are pausing, content to follow from afar, but that means they are only re-grouping their strength. Soon they will make another attack. It may come this way or that—maybe on this street corner where the lights of the Plaza Hotel shine in their old fashioned electroliers—friendly, comfortable lights—symbol of the well-fed and prosperous within.

How little do they think—those minked women coming down the steps, that they are walking into a strange battlefield. Their loud, parrot voices cut across the lines of force that flow between besieger and besieged, and make not an iota of difference. A man passes them in the street. A few minutes later (if their Cadillac hasn't yet come) they will be passed by two more beings. They won't even notice them. They can't. They are in another world. They are safe and on the solid sidewalk of Fifty Ninth Street. I am floating in an unknown limitless plane, a universe composed of only three things—myself and my two pursuers.

I cross Grand Army Plaza, pausing by the row of open fiacres, the well wrapped bony horses and the bored, cold coachmen; strange anachronism in a city of machines. I am almost tempted to take one of them and drive around, certain that my pursuers will do likewise.

That would be almost funny. To fight as no men have ever fought before, from two clip-clopping, creaking coaches with occasionally the horse's tail raised in defiant elimination; that would surely make history! Yes, if anyone were present to see and record it. But we fight alone, alone in a private empty universal void.

Instead, I cross the Avenue to East Sixtieth where the

entrance to the B.M.T. subway offers a temptation.

But I shall not go down there. We've tried that once and they know how to deal with me underground. No, I shall stay on the surface and walk, if necessary, till the early hours when the streets at last empty, except for patrolmen and those bedraggled, pathetic beings that only seem to come out at night. That will be the time of most danger. For then to be abroad and vagrant is inviting suspicion from every patrolling policeman. He has fewer people to interest him. Often he is alone for blocks at a time. Each face now gives him something to study, to relieve his monotony. And my face, my height, my build, these I know are posted in every precinct in Manhattan. It will then be a double danger. . . . Maybe that is just what they want. They want to wear me down to this point. Then, when the streets leave us alone, a sudden turning, an empty block; ourselves alone between one street and the next, then they will strike and I shall be defenceless.

If only there was somewhere I could go; somewhere they could not follow.

Here is East Sixtieth Street and the frowning cliff of a lordly men's club, and on this side the entrance to a noisy night club called The Copacabana. Beyond that is the Hotel Fourteen . . . No good going in there. I have no luggage and, besides, if I can go in they can follow . . . But across the road are houses . . . Numbers Nine . . . eleven . . . fifteen . . .

ELEVEN

'Eleven East Sixtieth Street.'

'If you've nothing better to do, give me a ring. I'm staying with the Hardwick Hopkins at Eleven East Sixtieth Street. He's a playwright and they're both rather divine people.'

Bunny said that when she left me at the dock.

There are lights in the upper windows of the house, friendly-looking lights. I shall be safe in there if it weren't for. . . .

Supposing they come in?

The house has a plate-glass door with heavy wrought-iron grille. Difficult to force. They can force the mind, but they have done nothing to show they can force heavy metals. In that house there is light, and peace and rest . . . or rest . . . somewhere to sit down . . . People, ordinary people to talk to, safe from pursuit, from police, from agents, from all who seek my destruction. . .

Every moment in the streets one of my other pursuers might recognise me and prevent me doing it. I must find a refuge, and here is one I know will welcome me and keep me till the morning. If those following try to force the door there will be others in the house besides me to deal with it.

Yes, it is a house converted into flats. Several bells, name-plates . . . this one . . . 'Hardwick Hopkins'.

I press it and, as I expected, find my shadows turning the corner, where they pause, watching.

Cautiously I try sounding their reaction to this move. Like a child pulling clothes out of a fire I make a swift dart into their stronghold and retire before they have sensed what has happened.

I receive a curious double reaction. A relief, a sense of relief and gladness that I should be ringing the bell, and also a certain desire that I should not do so. This baffles me until I realise that it was probably all prepared for my benefit. They knew, as they always know, what I'm going to do—in this case that I would wish to seek their reactions. So they had it all prepared and laid out for me; they set up two contradictory opinions merely to confuse.

I am startled by a violent buzzing in the framework of

the door; like an angry trapped hornet, then the door swings open a few inches.

Nothing to be alarmed about; only some kind of automatic lock-release and a signal to the person trying to get in. Well, the door's open now. They are starting towards me again.

Inside, then! Shut and bolt the iron as tight as I can!

A big grey hall with a highly ornamented ceiling. The hall of what was once a large old-fashioned house. A small elevator in the corner, the floors conveniently numbered and marked with the tenant's name.

Third Floor . . . Hardwick Hopkins. . .

The elevator stops. The doors open automatically, a small green entrance hall. A large door opens a few inches and—

'Who is it?' Bunny's voice.

'Is that you, Bunny?'

'Yes. Who is it?—Don't tell me. I recognise those golden tones. It is—it's—Darling! How simply wonderful!'

Bunny erupts into view, throws her arms round my neck and hugs me like a passionate kitten.

'The answer to a lonely maiden's prayer. How did you guess? I've been thinking about you all day. You poor darling, you look all in. Come and let me build you a good, stiff drink. I was just going to bed out of sheer frustration with a lousy good book, and here you are!—Mmmmmmmmmmm!

She is already dressed for bed—a thin silk gown over a pretty white fluffy nightie.

'Scuse the attire, but I'd given up all hope of visitors. The Hopkinses are away till tomorrow night and I'm all alone in the beeg wecked city! Boy! It's good to see you. I thought you'd forgotten all about me. Here, drink this. It's what we both need.'

From far away I think I hear a door rattling, an iron door. I listen carefully but it is not repeated. However, I get up and shut the front door of the apartment, drawing the bolts and attaching the chain.

Her eyes widen with an expression of feigned innocence, but she makes no comment. I sit myself in an armchair. Bunny takes the divan opposite. She stretches luxuriously and her eyes twinkle.

'Bunny, are you alone?'

'I was until now.'

'I mean in the building.'

'Oh, it's simply teeming. But don't worry about the neighbours. This isn't a nosy parker building. No one will care when you leave.'

'That isn't what I meant. If you were alone I wouldn't stay. It wouldn't be safe for you.'

'My dear *Mister* Lutterworth! If you're thinking about my reputation . . .'

'Your safety.'

She looks intrigued.

'Are you on the run or something?'

'Yes. Don't be under any illusion. I'm more than on the run. I'm running for my very existence. If I can hold out till tomorrow, it won't matter any more. But I have to lie hidden to-night. It's only fair to tell you you're taking a risk. These people are desperate. They may try to break in and kill me; maybe kill both of us.'

'But there's simply dozens of gorgeously efficient burglar alarms. The whole apartment's seething with them. Hardwick had a burglar a year ago, and they've fitted the place up with every possible gadget. I'll go now and turn them all on, then, if anyone so much as gets out of the elevator, alarms will ring all over the building; downstairs in the janitor's flat and also in the local police

station. So you couldn't find a safer spot in all New York.'

'Perhaps I've come to the right place, after all.'

'You bet you have. Hey, your drink's getting warm!'

'I'd much rather have coffee, if you've made any.'

'Oh, of course, how silly of me! Strictly no alcohol. How's the old head? Sure there's coffee. There's always coffee on the simmer: this is a civilised house.'

She goes out to the kitchenette, moving with self-assured strides that send ripples through her thin, tight gown. She returns holding a steaming hot cup of black delicious coffee which I drink gratefully.

'Food? There's a whole apple pie, if you're hungry.'

'Fine!'

'One apple pie, coming up.'

She perches herself on the arm of my chair, taking no trouble to close her dressing gown. A small finger begins curling a lock of my hair.

'I've often wondered what it would be like to be all alone at night with a dangerous criminal. I used to think out what I'd do to him. If he had me at his mercy, I'd feed him. I always saw myself giving him coffee and apple pie.'

When I have finished eating she leans over me to take my plate and her warm body presses into my cheek. Then, without getting up, she deftly places cup and plate on the floor and, as if by accident, slides into my lap.

'So now you've eaten, are you going to tell me all about it?—'

Why don't you touch me? Why don't you like me? . . . Hold me, you fool; find out just how much I like it.

Her thoughts come so clearly that I look up, embarrassed. Perhaps the startled look in my eyes disturbs her, for she uncoils herself and goes lazily to the divan. She stands looking down on me, challenging, sure of herself.

I'd relaxed. I'd lain my mind open again and picked up her thought in full detail:

Very few girls look like I do in a nightie. You can't be all that tired.

'Bunny, I think, after all, I'd better not stay. It's not fair to you.'

'Silly! I adore danger!'

'You don't understand. This isn't a game.'

'I don't care what it is. I want you to stay.'

'I should never have come here.'

I stand up and start for the door.

She rushes after me and grabs my hand.

'Oh, please don't go. You can't. They'll catch you. Hey, wait!—Wait a minute! I've got something of yours. Wait right here while I get it—and don't you disappear now.'

She opens a box, rummages through some papers till she finds it, a little gleaming fiery rainbow of light, a tube of scintillating brilliance, another crystal.

My heart fills with fear for her. 'Oh, my God! Don't tell me you've got one, too. I'd hoped you—'

She puts a finger on my mouth for silence.

I swiped it when you weren't looking.

'You never missed it—did you?'

'No, I didn't miss it.'

'I couldn't resist it. It was so pretty. Oh, promise not to be too angry. But I'm the most awful souvenir-hunter. I thought if you had a whole seventy-eight of the things you wouldn't miss just that one little one.'

. . . Seventy-seven, originally seventy-eight. . . . That explains it . . . and from outside, from the street, comes a sense of relief, of gladness. I now have them all.

'You'd better give it to me.'

'Not unless you're nice to me.'

Kiss me, you oaf!

'Bunny, please don't play with things you don't understand. Those things are dangerous. Men have been killed for having them. Get rid of it, give it back to me—please!'

Kiss me.

'Come and get it.'

She holds it out in front of her and comes slowly towards me. Suddenly it is in my hand and she is in my arms. Her warm, frantic mouth on mine, our arms locked; our bodies, blazing up in fire, sinking without any conscious effort on to the divan.

.

Passion is swift and breathtaking. It is violent and blinding. Then it is over and there is colossal peace.

The windows rattle once in a sudden wind and again a probing wave of enquiry comes from the watchers in the street; I shut it out rapidly, but not before I have learned enough to give me great satisfaction. They didn't like it. They didn't like it at all. Making love to Bunny has upset them.

'They didn't like that!'

'Mmmmm? Who didn't, darling?'

'Some people I know.'

'Who cares what they like?—I've never been so wonderfully happy and peaceful.'

She pulls the coverlets around us and turns off the light. For a long time we lie in each other's arms. Passion was rapid and, in retrospect, unimportant and now seems a long way behind as if it had never happened. This is the first time since my genesis on the ship that I have been able to express any affection for any being. Holding warm little Bunny with her soft long limbs twined about me,

I feel that I am holding the whole world; the entire human race lies in my arms, so soft, so unprotected, so needing love and shelter from the things in the street and in the void.

'You know, Bunny, I feel I shouldn't have made love to you.'

'But you did, Angel.'

'I don't regret it. I needed it; not the passion, but this. This stillness that lies beyond.'

'I've never felt it before. Not like this. Usually I want more and more, and end all keyed up and nowhere to go, but making love to you is—it makes me feel almost religious, if you can possibly see it that way.'

'Why not?'

'I think maybe you do understand.'

'I did once. Before my accident I did. I found that out just now. Once I knew just what it meant and how it was to be used. But now I'm just an ordinary human being who doesn't know. He only feels.'

... Again from the street that piercing enquiry, and then... laughter... yes, unmistakable laughter, melodious but slightly sad...

'Did you hear anything?'

'No, John, only your heart where my head rests on it.'

... I know deep down I have been unwise. This union has forged a link that is not in the plan and will complicate further issues. But even from my weakness has emerged a strength, a clearing away of so many straining forces, a blessed relief from the mental torture of the streets that reached their hideous climax before the door—Bunny's door—closed them out for ever.

I know now that I shall never sleep with her again—not that I don't want to—for this beautiful, still and perfect night is to be my last night on earth. I catch the warm

sweet scent of her breath near my mouth and kiss her tenderly and in that kiss we both drift into dreamless depths of quiet sleep.

When we awake she thinks for some time before making the announcement: 'Isn't it curious, darling, I'm actually not in love with you? I just love you. I love the whole human race. I feel that, after knowing you, even if I never see you again, I'll be a better, kinder person; a less selfish type of girl. Something of you brushed off on me last night, and it's a good something. Funny! On the boat I took one look at you and went head over heels. I wanted you then. God, how I wanted you! But you were always so elusive. Before the accident you held me off with the most brilliant intellect I've ever encountered. Talking to you was like bathing in fire—a sort of fire of Life—not the burning kind. And then, when it began to hurt, you'd make me laugh. You'd be so witty and amusing, you'd make me laugh so much I'd sort of laugh all my sexy feelings away. I believe you actually wanted it that way—then, after the accident, you were so different. Pompous, gloomy, almost frightening. The one time I tried to make you kiss me, something like a wall came down. As if someone were standing between us, or like getting a horrible electric shock. That last night in your cabin I thought you were hypnotising me. You suddenly seemed to change. You suddenly turned into something enormous and terrible—you scared the wits out of me. I can't quite describe it, but it was like going up to someone in the street and tickling the back of his neck and, when he turns round, you see he is God.'

'Wouldn't it be terrible if I turned out to be the devil?'

'No, it wouldn't. I'm a naughty girl, and shall probably

go to hell for all my sins. But if you were running it, it wouldn't be so bad.'

'I wonder—Bunny—I wonder if the only real sin isn't misery—giving way to misery and fear.'

'But, darling, that's just how I always feel. I mean if you were God and you'd made the world so beautiful and so full of wonderful things, and the sun to shine down on it all, wouldn't you be terribly hurt if people went around with long po-faces not appreciating it?'

'Perhaps.'

She pulls on her long black jeans and white shirt and then starts to unburden

'My love may not be the purest, darling. But I've never been hurtful to anyone. No one can say that about me. But I'd rather be generous—perhaps too generous, and even silly—I'd rather give too much than too little.'

She looks like a child with her curls filling into her eyes.

'Daddy was a bishop, bless the old sweet. But I never could understand why he used to get steamed up about people enjoying themselves, and wanting to stop them having any fun—even the most harmless fun on Sundays. I mean the Day of the Sun should be bright and gay and happy. How could a Power that made anything as glorious as the Sun ever be gloomy and sanctimonious like they pretend Him to be, even for one tiniest moment? Daddy used to get up Sunday after Sunday and put on his diary sabbath voice and that holier-than-thou expression and—you know something—he always seemed to be a different person. It wasn't the real Daddy at all, it was some kind of dummy saying words he had been taught to say, not the kind sticky old thing I loved so—I just didn't believe it. I still don't. I think cruelty and spite and forcing people to accept our own little views are the

greatest sin. . . . Oh, John, I wouldn't dare go round teaching that this and that are the will of God. I just wouldn't have the nerve. . . . It seems so presumptuous! And, anyway, if we were all meant to act the same we'd all be made exactly the same, wouldn't we? Why, no two blades of grass are quite alike. I don't think any two things in the universe have exactly the same expected of them. . . . Oh, John.' She throws her arms round me impetuously. 'I haven't done wrong; tell me you don't think I've been very bad, seducing you.'

'How can I judge you? darling, how *can* I?'

'But you're not angry with me, are you, darling?'

I hug her determinedly; carefully push the curls out of her eye before replying: 'You precious darling! Where do you think I'd be this morning if it hadn't been for you?'

She looks up solemnly: 'Where?'

I don't want to frighten her, so I answer: 'Only you, Bunny, you and your wild impetuous sweet honesty could have done it.'

'Done what, darling?'

'Brought me right down to earth, given me back my peace of mind.'

'Did I *really* do that for you?'

'More than you know.'

'Then . . .' that impish grin again: '. . . maybe I've found my vocation?'

I laugh and run a finger across her lips: 'I wouldn't try it too often. I don't think it would always work.'

'Lover, you're all too damn right. After last night it's going to be the real thing or nothing. But as we're never going to make love again . . . oh, I know that; you don't have to tell me . . . I'll just wait for the one and only. I understand. Last night was something very special, something not quite in the book. I was sent to help you; I know

I was, and I'll always thank God for it . . . and for you.'
 . . . Seems strange to be saying this, but I must for it is true:

'Don't ever change, Bunny. Stay just as you are and you'll reach the Sun.'

A little later she raises her eyes to me; they are moist and luminous, and the most beautiful of all I have seen on Earth.

'Goodbye, darling--I shan't ever forget. Not ever!'

'I won't either!'

It is time to leave; time to do the thing I came to do; time to go to the hall with locked doors and find the thing that is going to change the face of the world. Downstairs I catch a glimpse of something black and white leaning over the stairwell, and a little voice drifts down to me

'Take care of yourself! Please take care! . . . God bless you!'

Then the outside door shuts her off and with her, some of the peace. Out in the street the harsh strident traffic and the hurrys and worries and all the turbulent thoughts of a morning-people burst upon me. As I cross the road something white is watching from the window, but I turn away and walk determinedly to the steel and glass tower on the river where I know they will be waiting for me. I am stronger now; calm and rested, so when I see them converging on me they have lost the horror of the night. I knew they would be waiting, and it is almost a relief to see them. They are standing in the main entrance of the UNO Building; patient, silent, knowing with absolute certainty that I must come.

I stand on the far side of the street and watch them. They stand in the doorway, watching me.

For a moment I feel like running away and finding a

side entrance. But that would be futile; for they would be there . . . waiting . . .

I don't know what their plan is. But I shall have to pass them if I am to enter the building. So far I have always been able to keep them at a distance. Now, to reach my final goal, I shall have to pass between them. I don't know what powers they have what their effect may be at close range. But they know, and they also know I shall have to meet them. That is what they want. They want to have me right between them . . . helpless.

Then, of a sudden, all fear leaves me. I remember Bunny and her trusting faith in life and how, if she were here now, she'd just walk straight on, knowing that if she were not afraid, nothing could hurt her. And I know she is right. I shall lower my defences to them. I shan't resist nor fight. I shall hold them in my mind as friends and they will be harmless.

Even as I take this decision it breaks in like a bell. Not a command, but a request.

Approach us.

It comes again, clearer this time. Not so much words as a thought repeating.

Approach us.

And this time I sense relief and joy at being able to come through . . . Who are you? Why do you persecute me? What do you want. . . ?

Don't be afraid, or we cannot reach you.

. . . Must be sure . . . must be quite sure that this is real. . . . If you can hear me, turn round once in a full circle . . . sunwise . . .

Immediately they do so, a slow, perfectly timed right-hand circle. . . . Who are you. . . ?

A moment's pause, a second of infinite sadness and disappointment that I do not know.

Part of you.

... I must be sure. Do not lie ...

More ... more ... more than any friend ...

... No, you do not lie. Out here in the morning sun you cannot lie. I would see it, would know ...

We speak truth.

... What do you wish me to do?

Join us.

The traffic is dense, cars and taxis arriving: many people entering the building. ... Now I am on the marble concourse ... approaching the door ... able to see them quite clearly ... a man and a woman ... familiar faces ... ones I have known in dim past. ... Not afraid any more ... not afraid ...

But ... I know you ... know you.

Again that infinite sadness and a note of patient longing.

Come, time is short.

It is the man this time.

There is a quiet place where we must go. Do not question till we get there.

Gentle firmness in his wish, against which I do not argue.

... But who are you? Tell me who you are. ...

Again the sadness, and the desire that I do not repeat the question.

... But why couldn't you get through to me before?

Each time we tried you sent us away.

... But you could have approached me ...

We did, but you ran away. Whenever we found you, you turned and ran ... you were so afraid.

... You could have spoken to me like this ...

There was a wall of fear around you. We could not pierce it ... couldn't make you hear our voice.

... But now you can? ... I don't understand. ...

*Fear shut you out from everything—even from your Own.
 . . . You could have broken through . . . forced down
 the wall . . .*

Against the Law . . . cannot enter by force.

. . . Could have tried. . . Anything better than fear . . .

Once we tried . . . tried the subtle opening of the mind . . .

*Dangerous . . . nearly destroyed you . . . cannot be done . . .
 against the Law . . . Sanctuary inviolate.*

*. . . That moment in Times Square . . . when my head
 split open . . . I remember . . .*

*Forgive . . . should never have attempted violation . . .
 forgive.*

*We have entered the building. . . . We turn right and
 come to a grey curtain.*

In here - follow.

*A quiet room, soft light, rows of chairs facing a kind
 of altar. But instead of an altar the great red trunk of an
 ancient tree . . . peace here . . . silence.*

*In this little chapel we shall commune . . . Sit between us at
 the apex of a triangle . . . each in that position.*

*We take our places a few feet from one another and
 we relax our minds in preparation for what is to come.*

*In this silent chapel two or three people are sitting in
 meditation. From one a prayer for peace ascends; I can
 actually see its form—a rising silver spine-like structure
 rising to a great height beyond the roof, then turning
 outwards and permeating the whole building. It is
 colossal, the power of the mind. How little do men
 realise the god-power they have within them, power
 sufficient to move worlds in their orbits . . .*

*The man is calling me . . . telling me to take his hand
 in my right hand . . . and the woman takes my left hand
 . . . now we are joined in a three-stage unit of concentrated
 power. The clarity increases many-fold. . . . Know*

... know who you are ... coming back to me ... part of my past ... I know you ... I know you ... all coming back ...

The man turns his head to face me.

Look into my eyes.

... The most familiar face. ... It is my own face ... my face, but slightly younger ... My brother!

No need to say anything ... No need to ask forgiveness. He understands ... He knew all that happened ... the accident ... my damaged brain ... loss of memory ... In his eyes I see only deep sympathy and understanding, and gladness that I have come back.

And now from the girl comes a warmth, a flow, an all-embracing wave of love that makes me afraid to look at her ... Twin soul born at moment in time, but not of time ... born of our race when the world-schemes were first called into being ... twin soul ... my female self ... my wife ...

Our eyes meet, and I know that all is wiped away and forgiven. We are one being again, as in the beginning.

She was with me in my despair, following at a distance. Repelled each time she tried to give comfort, turned away at each approach, was behind me as I ran through the city. She was outside when I locked the doors, and was in the street when I took comfort in the arms of another ...

... I am overcome with remorse ...

... I didn't know. Why didn't I know? Why didn't you stop me going into this house? You could have guided me away from her door ... Forgive me ...!

That child had taken one of the crystals. We knew she regretted taking it, so we guided you to her house so she might return it of her own free will.

... But one more, surely, would not have mattered?

There are seventy-eight members of these United Nations. You had only seventy-seven crystals. Had one been missing, the whole Plan would have been brought to naught, frustrated, defeated.

. . . I remember . . . I sounded them before entering Bunny's place. Had a double reaction. They wanted me to go in, and also did not want it . . . She knew what would happen . . . She knew . . .

Yes, I knew . . . I knew . . .

. . . And you are not angry?

If my love for you can be called anger . . . then I was angry.

. . . Forgive me . . .

My brother is laughing . . . He seems amused by the whole business.

It wouldn't be the first time the Olympians have fallen to charming mortals . . . The legends are filled with deeds so scandalous, I blush for our race . . . dear brother!

Like a lightning dart the reproach flashes out from the girl.

Be silent!

He makes an impish grimace and turns away, leaving me to face the fire of beauty that is my twin-soul.

For a while we look silently into each other and as my heart opens to embrace her I see, slowly, the wound heal.

She lowers her head and speaks gently; little tones of liquid silver running in my head.

It is not lawful to join with them . . . dearest twin. But there are many things we do not understand, and here was a deep mystery . . . In a strange and marvellous way that child was sent to you where I had failed . . . She helped you . . . she took away your fear . . . and she was pure in heart . . .

Please don't resent her . . .

She smiles . . . and shakes her head.

How can I resent her? You have now made her part of us . . .

part of you . . . and anything that is part of you I can only love with all my being.

She has nothing more to say.

The matter is closed.

My brother feels tentatively to see if she has finished, before asking: *Is there anything else you would like to know before we begin?*

. . . Those crystals? . . .

Explain fully later.

. . . But their power; the way let they us communicate like this?

My wife answers this . . .

It's not the crystals. It is YOU!

. . . I don't understand . . .

It has nothing to do with the crystals—NOTHING!

Your natural powers were damaged . . . During the past week they have been restored little by little . . . so at first you knew them only as vague hunches . . . You felt you shouldn't stay with your friends in California. But you didn't know why—Had you been well you would have known the reason . . . Later you heard fragments like voices . . . Soon, as your ability returned, you received every thought that came to you, but you were unable to control them. The terrible impact of unfiltered thoughts entering your unprotected mind was more than you could bear—you could have lost your reason—so dreadful was their assault . . . power without control is a most dangerous thing . . .

My brother adds:

So now you see why we had to be careful when we discovered you in this state.

. . . You mean I can do this normally?

It is normal and natural. But those glands in the brain, those delicate reception centres were damaged . . . only today are they nearly restored.

. . . What *did* happen on the ship? Was I deliberately attacked?

He concentrates—casting his mind upon the Record:

As far as I can see, a tool left by a mechanic on a gallery slipped and fell onto your head. You then fell down a flight of steps, striking your head a second time . . .

. . . Then why didn't you try to find me earlier?

Because of your orders to cease all communication a week before the day lest others, skilled in these arts, learned what was planned. You ordered us to keep away from you till all was fulfilled. You ordered complete mental silence and we obeyed.

My Twin intervenes:

It was I who disregarded your orders . . . No contact came from you at the appointed times . . . you had disappeared . . . vanished . . . so we came to search for you . . . It was desperately difficult . . . your signals weak . . . so much interference . . . We saw you at last in great danger . . . and we hurried to be with you . . . That is where you first saw us . . . under the tree at the place of burial . . . But you didn't recognise us. You were frightened and you sent us away.

. . . Yes, I sent you away . . . I feared you because you were different and unlike anything I had known. But this thing I have come here to do: what is it? Tell me what it is that we may do it together . . .

Not together. You shall do it alone.

. . . Alone?

It was planned that way. You must do it alone.

. . . I shall need you . . .

We shall stay with you. We shall be in the Chamber together, but you will do it your- self

. . . How? They will stop us.

They will not be consulted.

. . . But the guards . . . the doors are guarded . . . How shall we enter?

No one will stop us.

... But how ... How?

Kyredo.

... Kyredo? ... Yes, now I know. By Kyredo we shall enter. You will show me how it is performed ...

You know, Old One. You shall perform it as in ancient times ... And we shall be at your side.

... I understand ... Tell me, then, who is Lutterworth? Laughter.

They insist upon the label of a name. Lutterworth was a convenience. His past, his background and his future, all these were chosen by you. Have you forgotten all this?

My brother speaks urgently:

There is little time left ... much to be understood ... Soon they will begin their meeting ... Before then you must know everything. You must scan the Records to remind yourself of everything that has led up to this moment ...

... My memory is still lacking ... I don't know how to ...

You shall use the World Memory ... the silent record of all things ... Give your mind over to us ... Form the triangle of power and it will be totally restored.

... But how? I don't know these ...

Relax your mind. Trust us.

... But explain. Tell me how ...

Be quiet!

Her sapphire eyes blaze at me, commanding instant silence. Then her gentleness returns, she raises my fingers to her lips and sends me reassurance. Rapidly I feel the worry and turmoil die down, and I am ready to receive.

Immediately they concentrate their power, bright bands of force flow between us in the form of a triangle. It is that cold, radiant feeling of going up ... becoming immensely large ... the break-through.

Gently, they place invisible hands of the mind upon the seal of my memory. They do not open it; they guide and direct me so that I can open it for myself . . . The contents rush out like a golden flood and for a moment I am overcome at the enormity of it . . . Then, when I have understood the first part of the procedure, once more those gentle, guiding forces come into play and lead me to the second seal . . . Slowly, as the obscuring darkness is dispelled, it is like looking down into an endless vastness of being. Through the vastness comes form, and purpose crystallising into a point . . . a thousand threads, woven and inter-woven come together at this moment; the moment before the last . . .

Once more I feel their unspoken guidance directing me further . . . but this time with less effort and again, like great megaliths, the covers glide open and I sink deeper into my innermost being . . .

. . . I know now what it is I have to do .

They will not do it, but they will be near me when I do it. They cannot do it, for it was not conceived that way. When every possibility had been explored, every choice with its consequences examined and the final choice accepted, then they searched for the one who should carry it out . . . In the search of many individual destinies there had appeared one most suited—the one who had first inspired this particular and—later—chosen scheme . . . myself . . .

Once more I am guided back, deeper, deeper into the past, and once more the great blocks roll apart and I am carried away in the completeness of knowing—*who I am*.

We sit in mental silence . . . stilling our thoughts . . . waiting . . . with my ever-increasing sight I am able to see flowing between us coloured waves that interblend and weave us into a tight unity . . . As we sit there in a

triangle, two men and one woman thinking in one mind, a hush falls upon us. It is like the approach of a great wind, a silent wind of light, and the beginnings of a remembrance far greater than any given to me so far, . . . The light is approaching but it is all around us and within us. It is rushing towards us and we are rushing towards it. It is all about us and over us and beside us and it has a great sound. The sound is the voice of the Sun, and the chords of the planets and the eternal bourdon of deep space. It is everywhere, yet it is concentrating in this little room. It is growing in brightness and in form, and is filling us with increasing radiance. For one sublime moment it is fully perceived by the inner eyes.

For a blinding instant I am one with the Light and am enfolded within It. Then It withdraws, leaving behind the ineffable Presence that is part of us, and part of all men, even though they may not perceive it.

The Light which itself transcends form and personality has in the past appeared many times on this world, under many forms, many personalities; all races know Him under different names most suited to their times. In its boundless spirit, it is Light; in His personality He is our King and Father; in His plurality and Total Being we know of Him as 'WORLD LOVE'.

We are hushed and greatly exalted.

All fragments of doubt were consumed in the Light. We, the instruments, are fully prepared to complete that which must now be done.

Slowly my brother rises.

My wife rises.

In a group we leave the chapel and make our way along the busy corridors to the main entrance of the

Council Chamber. The door marked 'Delegates Only' is guarded by officials. But they do not see us coming, nor our passing through the doors into the chamber.

We enter a tall, curved room, round at one end like a pointed globe, like another great room I knew long ago, like a shadow of another great chamber in another age, another world. But even in its distortion I recognise the great thought underlying its conception, though that thought went far astray in its translation into matter.

Together we walk forward, taking our positions in the centre, before the President's rostrum. No one has noticed us, for our frequencies are raised beyond their very limited perception. We are in Kyredo.

The quarrel is in progress; all the carefully prepared lies and twisting speeches, the eternal accusations and rebukes, the dark, writhing serpents of fear and distrust that entwine the mind and bewilder the senses. And over it all, in the dome, sprawls a vast painting, chaotic and fearful like their thought-forms, a wretched choice, a stupid one. Its negative emanation subconsciously influence the minds already beset by fear, increasing their bewilderment. I see in its conception a work of the Stupid Ones, prompted by the Old Darkness, that ancient power once called to play a crucial part in forming the worlds, later springing out of control and spreading over the Earth. It is here today, desperately seeking the final destruction of men, without which it must be annihilated and go down for ever. But I no longer fear it. Its hours are numbered. It will play no part in the time towards which we move—The Time of Splendour.

The speaking delegate finishes his address. There is a pause, a sudden hush; the writhing serpent-thoughts are stilled. All are now aware that something is about to happen.

NOW.

It is NOW. We know it is NOW.

They gasp. Out of nowhere I have appeared. They see me for the first time. No longer the image, but reality. They see and they hear me. I raise my arms, and the gasps and babble die down. I begin to speak the words we knew and decided long ago. Each hears me in his own tongue. How do you speak that all men may hear you in their own tongues? It is an art known and practised by teachers of old. You create an illusion of speaking; in reality you form the thought from which the words are born, and that thought you strengthen a hundredfold until it can enter easily into the minds around you. But they, through long habit, imagine they hear words when in fact it is the thought they receive, unhampered and undimmed by other senses. Because it is thought and not sound, many in the other parts of the building, and even passers in the street, seem clearly to hear my voice. But the machines, the tape recorders and other devices hear nothing. No matter, it is fully recorded by the secretaries.

Because I speak to them in thought, and their habit-minds clothe it in their own idiom, the whole operation is very brief; a matter of minutes. But if set down here will appear much longer. Such is the failing of word language.

I begin by calming them at my sudden appearance from Kyredo by embracing their minds in an overwhelming sensation of peace. That way I am able to attune them to me and to sustain us all as one mind, where they are assured that no magical trickery is employed. For the young man who has appeared out of nowhere is a man like themselves. And in this unity of mind I am able to speak to them not as nations, tribes and divided factions, but as men. Every tribe has its shortcomings;

I do not judge them, criticise nor take sides. I address them as representatives of the human race, nothing more.

Then I project a picture of the world divided against itself into countless pockets of insanity, and with it the question why this should be so? Why should semi-rational beings behave worse than those with no reason at all—Why?

The answer they return is—Need—Fear—•

I had expected it.

They truly believe that hunger and lack of resources is their basic reason for war. They believe that when every man has sufficient he will no longer wish to fight.

That may be.

We shall see

Again I ask their minds: What would they do if every nation had unlimited electrical power—power for the taking—power costing nothing to obtain and available to all men equally?

They think—it would bring peace—peace—peace—a planetary paradise. Others think—it would be their ruin—end their empires-- their oil, their coal—their power. Yet secretly, every man has wished for such a force since the densening of the planet placed matter beyond the control of the mind. He has come to believe that spiritual progress is impossible without material necessities. He has believed it, desired it, made it so.

Very well, he shall be given that wealth; he has long sought it, and by one-pointed desire has called it into being—no longer a dream but a physical reality.

Now let us see what he can do with it. Let us see if, under easier conditions, he is able to build the planetary paradise he has always desired, or will abuse his new leisure to the destruction of his soul. Let us see if godly power will make him a little more godlike.

This power, I tell them, shall change the face of the Earth. No more shall small groups, nor even single men, be able to rule multitudes through hunger in their bellies; for there shall no more be hunger nor want nor cold; and in time again there shall be no more disease, for as man learns to live in harmony with nature, instead of continually struggling against it, he will destroy the cause of disease.

The coming of this power, I assure them, was brought about by their desire, making its discovery inevitable sooner or later. Our function is only to secure its correct timing and propagation in the Order of Things. And because that Order has been prematurely advanced by man's restless seeking, the hour for its release has been brought forward ahead of time, even though such knowledge would normally be withheld from an immature humanity. And the reason is this—

Some years ago, in the blood struggle that still continues, the quest for destructive powers opened by force, and against the Order of Things, the 'First seal of the universe'—the so-called atomic power. Man sought and found, not the whole by any means, but a surface aspect of Primary Force, an explosive power sufficient to destroy him and with him all life.

This power is only the 'negative' or retrograde aspect, and its release has caused a serious imbalance. This imbalance can only be corrected by releasing the 'positive' and creative aspect, a force whose existence he barely suspects.

Now in times long past, times beyond the memory of any of the earth's races, other great nations rose and sought this power. They found it, and other powers of which men barely dreamed. But they, too, sought it only for conquest, and in fear they unleashed it.

But Earth is not, as you imagine, an insentient lump of dead mineral, wandering eternally through cold, empty space. She is a vibrant living being one of the countless children of countless million families of great beings, compared to which your physical bodies are less than microbes.

In days of old, when the human microbe scorched her venerable surface and disturbed the great tides and flows within her body, she trembled. She heeled over and shook man from her back. So great was her torment that its wave went out into space and caused tremors in all her sister worlds.

Earth is your host, life-giver, your kind and bountiful Mother. Treat her as you would wish her to treat you and she will reward you, giving you an abundance of all things. Treat her with abuse and renewed abuse, then by the inexorable laws of cause and effect she must rid herself once more of sentient life and lie fallow—perhaps till the end of her span.

After the last catastrophe, man was given another chance. From the caves which you falsely imagine to be cradles of mankind, the survivors emerged and rebuilt the human races. But today Earth is too old. The Day too far advanced. Already your Day has passed Noon; and another destruction would spell eternal darkness.

. . . I correct myself as I find my thoughts slipping into the abstract metaphors of our people . . .

I sense a query—How? (comes the question) How then were we permitted to discover our atonic power if it will destroy us?—How, if there is an Order of Things, as you say? How can that be?

I answer them directly, for it is time they knew.

‘You brought it about of yourselves. Your own actions drew the line and called for an accounting. Immemorial

years of bloodshed and violence have created for you the supreme violence. It is Man's Ultimatum to Himself . . . to live the Life, or leave this world for ever!'

'Do not foolishly imagine that the One we know, as The Indwelling Spirit, the One you perceive but dimly neath a host of tribal names, brought this to you—You brought it to yourselves.

'And do not believe that we have come to save you despite yourselves, no man can do that. And likewise, do not believe that disaster is inevitable or pre-destined. Nothing is pre-destined. I say to you that even the Great Weavers of Destiny can only weave the threads that you yourselves spin.

'Now, in accordance with the causes you have created, you have brought about the revelation of a second power—one greater by far than the atom—one on which you can build a world of no want, no ill, no pain. You would have made this discovery anyway in the course of time. Our intervention at this moment is merely to control the timing of its release, instantaneously in every country. Nothing more.'

I pause.

'With it you may build a new world if the few foolish ones who wish power for its own sake give way to the will of Man. For Man, seen in his Whole, does not seek evil. Man desires only that his destiny may be fulfilled; and deep in his heart—in every heart here present—he knows that his destiny is without limit, is beyond his wildest longing, or the escapist dreaming of semi-prophets; greater by far than all worlds together. I or his destiny is infinite.'

(I see here some foolish ones fidgeting and wondering why the guards do not remove me from the floor. Save your energy, for the guards cannot touch me. Nor can

you so much as rise from your seats to lay hands on me. Try it, if you do not believe me.)

'This power I speak of is the positive power of the Universe. Whereas the power you have obtained through fear is negative power. The one is creative; the other destructive. The power I shall give you cannot be used in war, nor can it destroy, so it will be of little interest to those who still fidget. But to you—the majority of men who, despite your confusion, are men of goodwill—it will be power to achieve all that you have hoped and prayed to obtain. In fact, because of your actions, you have set in motion sufficient causes to bring it into being. Therefore, it is not we who have brought it, but *you yourselves*. You have obtained it because *you* caused it; such is the eternal law.

'For so long as the necessity of physical needs occupied the greater part of man's time, he was unable to progress into the new life. In the coming age that you have created for yourselves, no man need spend his whole time providing for the body. That time is past and done with. The very substance of the sun's planets is changing, particularly this dense earth, the hardest and most tragic of the worlds. But the Day draws on and drastic changes are at hand. Not every man here will survive those changes, for where darkness is impenetrable, the excess of light will be destructive. So, for the sake of the majority who have won the right to live, these changes must come, and come they shall. No one can prevent it, any more than he can turn back the sun from his course.

'Today I shall give you the key that will enable you to prepare yourselves for the changes. And I warn you with terrible solemnity—all of you—do nothing to prevent it, or you will cease to exist.'

I walk forward to the table and take out my living crystals . . .

My thoughts continue:

'Unknown to most of you, what happens today is only the crowning point of a plan that has been in operation for many years. A search was made in every nation, and gradually men were found in each to carry out the plan. Sometimes it was only one man. Sometimes it was a scientist or scholar, sometimes it was a simple, untutored man. The search was long and arduous but in the end men were found in every country who could be guided to produce a simple apparatus to harness the cosmic energy of space which, in greatly reduced form, you know as the earth's magnetic field. These energies are eternal and inexhaustible. They can never wear out nor diminish. Had you studied the positive electricity you call static, rather than the negative which you erroneously call dynamic, you would have discovered it before today. But under our guidance, the time for its discovery was advanced, and a group in each nation was guided to produce a machine—varying in detail but uniform in principle—that will give you unlimited electrical power, without cost, for ever . . .'

. . . Gasps . . . murmurs . . . wonderment . . . and even fear amongst the foolish ones . . .

'Our problem was not how to lead you to its discovery but how to time its release. For even though men in every nation worked upon its problems, it was inevitable that one should encounter setbacks another had missed, and that one should succeed ahead of another. And, had any nation received this wealth ahead of another, their frightened leaders might have precipitated the cataclysm we seek to avoid. Therefore, secretly we helped each group to prepare the plans and working models. In

every nation today there is such a model in being, complete but for one small vital part, the focusing crystal of each machine. These we have withheld until we could give one to each nation simultaneously, and without preference.'

'Monstrous! . . . ' 'A maniac! . . . ' 'Stop him! . . . ' 'Throw him out!'

. . . The fidgeting ones again . . . Let them rave . . .

. . . But others are forcing the fidgeting ones to hold their peace . . .

The uproar subsides . . .

'You have provided the time and the place for the handing over of these crystals . . . one to each representative here today. Those nations not represented are at this moment being visited, and their leaders will find the necessary part in their "invulnerable" safes before morning. They will read reports of today's proceedings and will know how to apply them.'

I open the bag, and the little points of fire roll out on to the table . . .

'Here then are the pieces of which I have spoken. Seventy-eight all told!—one for each nation present.* These are simple things and easy to produce. They are built of a form of crystal which, acting as the focussing point for a series of coils, will when properly aligned, concentrate the planet's natural magnetism, that positive and ever-flowing "electricity", and harness it to your needs.'

Again I use a thought picture; that of a small black box containing little more than specially-shaped coils and magnets, the whole when correctly aligned to the planetary fields inducing what they think of as an electric

* At the time of this story there will be seventy-eight members of the United Nations

current. This picture makes the little machine seem less strange to their minds, almost as if they have seen a demonstration. In picture I insert the crystal, make fine adjustment, and rotate the tuning screw until a rattling, buzzing noise indicates that primary frequencies are being obtained. The noise (I help them understand) means that the tuning has not yet reached true resonance. As soon as the tuning is correct the noise subsides and the electric lights connected to the output leads begin to glow brightly. That's all there is to it. They will glow until they burn out. A larger machine will produce more power, by the square of certain dimensions of certain parts. So, great size will never be required for great output.

I leave the image in their minds as I continue:

'Every city, every community, every house, every lonely cottage can now have a small, cheap machine that will provide all the light and power it needs. And then . . .'

I raise the voice of my mind to its full power:

'There will be no possible reason for one tribe to attack another. With your material wants fulfilled, man must live in harmony with himself, or cease to exist.'

You have spoken well, Brother. You have spoken well.

. . . I shall let them rest awhile, then we must continue . . .

No! . . . they are ready now. Continue speaking.

'What I have told you is so very simple that I know you understand and grasp its full significance. Tomorrow each delegate will return to his country where he will find those who have hitherto been forced to work in secrecy awaiting him with their part of the machine. He will insert this crystal in the presence of the people and it will immediately produce continuous power. It is quite useless for the foolish ones to attempt to suppress

it, either in fear of the people or fear of their economy falling asunder, for if one nation suppresses it another will surely produce it. Therefore, you are all obliged to develop this power to the full, and to deny it to no man. Yes, I understand that for many this will cause temporary discomfort and suffering. Your complex economies are not adjusted to receive anything so elementary. Like everything in this tortuous world, you cannot endure the straightforward simple things. But that is your grievance. No longer will you be able to have power of life and death over men through their bellies. No longer will you be able to enforce reverence where no reverence is due. In time to come a man will be respected solely for what he is, and that you must face fairly and honestly, or suffer your own consequences.'

. . . One of the delegates is laughing . . . some are smiling . . . several are crying . . . tears of joy and emotion . . . others are pale—one will destroy himself tonight . . . foolish man . . . I cannot save him . . . Would that I could.

Tell them more. Tell them more.

'When you have applied this principle, then you will discover another. You will, through the development of that science you now call hydroponics, learn how to produce fruits of the earth in every quantity by a harnessing of these rays. You have learned so far to produce four times the yield of growing plants in tanks of chemical instead of earth. Soon you will learn how to produce harvests overnight, out of the very air itself. And these crops, produced out of solar rays, will contain all the life-giving forces you have ever sought, so you will no longer be forced into eating decayed flesh of those unable to defend themselves. Slowly you will learn that all life is your brother, from the smallest to the greatest sentient

being . . . When you no longer war with other kingdoms, they will cease to war upon you. Those poisonous insects and virulent microcosms that slay you by the thousand came into being only by necessity of the law of balance. When you have learned to live in peace, they will go their way and evolve as intended.

‘But these later discoveries will only be yours if you prove yourselves capable of receiving them. For there is Justice in the Universe, my friends; not the least thing can happen without producing its equal and opposite effect. When you *think* peace, you shall have peace. When you are at one with all, then and only then shall you be whole.’

Warn them. Warn them of the danger.

‘Before I depart, I would again warn you that already your experiments with the negative forces have caused serious imbalance in the normal function of this planet. I told you earlier how once before the same misuse of these forces caused the world to change its axis and, to a degree, its actual orbit around the sun. Already the heart of the earth begins to move in discomfort. You are playing with a power you know nothing whatever about. You are blind children, groping with fire, and if you continue these practices, even for the purest scientific purposes, you may cause a sudden imbalance that will submerge one third of the dry surface.’

. . . I pause to let them take that in . . . The records will be read and pondered in every land . . . many times . . . but they should be given time to think.

‘I may tell you that this change is already beginning. The best we can hope for is that it will be a gradual development, and not a sudden catastrophic tilt, as in olden times. We shall do our utmost to alleviate that condition, but we shall need your full co-operation.

More than that I shall not say now, for I want you to give your full attention to the revelation of the moment.

Walking forward . . . I raise my arms and turn to the whole assembly . . .

'For this we have lived; for this we have planned; for this have many died and suffered. You were told and you scoffed, that the meek shall inherit the Earth. But I say to you the day has come when the man of peace and brotherhood shall inherit the kingdom he will build. But those who oppose it shall never again tread this long-suffering Earth. Those who wish to live shall live; but those who cannot live without destroying, shall themselves be destroyed, till the end of time. It is for you, and you alone, to make the choice. Think well, for the great heritage is yours.'

Then I spread my arms towards them and feel the power of the blessing flowing through me . . .

It was all done very quickly. Only minutes were required to impress these thoughts indelibly on their minds, for a thought is instantaneous and its grasping depends on its strength and clarity. Now, before I go, I want to leave one more impression, lest some are later tempted to doubt their own minds.

So, for a moment, three people are distinctly visible on the rostrum; a man—the speaker; and beside him another man and a woman. For a moment all three appear in solid flesh, then—not too quickly—they begin to fade; objects behind appear through them; three faint outlines, then nothing. Nothing left but a little hard crystal glowing softly in the palm of a delegate's hand. Such small things. So harmless in themselves. But in a moment they have destroyed a world, silently and without bloodshed. Now they reflect the lights of a planet that is only a few minutes old.

II

so now it is done. Our part of the work is complete and we are setting out for home. There is great stillness within us, a tranquillity born of thanks that one more fragment of ourselves has been brought nearer to the Day of Attainment, that still distant goal which we sometimes think of as 'The Time of Splendour'.

In times past it has been no more than a faint point of light, feeble on an unattainable horizon; at other times it has seemed to dim and become imperceptible, as if it were no more. But today it blazes all around us, made brilliant by the knowledge that a doomed globe may yet become the jewel in the crown.

How foolish it is to rest on your glory; to believe you have achieved a final goal, or to rest content that your state of life is the highest that can be reached in this one aeon. Truly, you could say we had built on our worlds a paradise for man, that our knowledge enabled us to attain all we desired, ever and beyond.

We found a paradise and imagined it to be perfect and complete. Then it was that we found it imperfect. Then it was we learned a law we had forgotten. From far across time came the heart-cry of a world of men who could not share with us what we had made. We were within. They were without: excluded.

That is when we learned the Law that no man can know joy so long as a single being still suffers. No man can endure paradise while other men are shut out.

That is why it had to be done.

That is why we had to leave our bright home, renounce our birthright and join the silent watchers.

You are thoughtful.

. . . Yes, Twin, I am thoughtful . . . Come with me, I wish to show you something.

We make our way down the galleries of the ship, passing as we go the small craft that brought us aboard. Its familiar outline causes me to stop, and smile at a sudden memory.

Why do you pause? Why do you look at it like that, as though you'd never seen it before . . .

I was thinking of something . . . of an old man taking photos on the top of a mountain.

And a hardware store?

Yes, it does look rather like one of their lampshades . . . Poor old Minovsky . . . I misjudged him badly . . . Some day we must really see he gets a proper photo . . .

She is puzzled.

. . . Never mind, my dearest. I have something more important to show you . . . Come to the viewing window . . . Come . . .

Together we stand, side by side, gazing out at the beyond. For a while we are lost in wonder. No matter how often we have seen it, the impact is undiminished. Those who have not seen it cannot imagine the awesome majesty. It is alive with vibrant movement which, to the opened vision, presents a ceaseless splendour of harmony and colour. Many have written of it from their imaginations, but have failed to recount its least glory. A few have written of it who have been carried here by us, but they have seen it only indirectly with eyes unattuned to reality. But those who have seen it with vision know it is the greatest of the marvels that have form. For, unless you have seen it for yourself, you cannot conceive what it is like to gaze out into Deep Space.

But this time something has changed, is not the same as I knew it. The myriad worlds of light and the vibrant

galaxies seem not as beautiful as the little globe below us; that dark world of confusion and pain to which we journeyed with silent dread in our hearts.

The ship hangs motionless. Why have we stopped? Our work is done. Are we not going home?

... Can it ever be done? ... Can it? ...

... Can we leave what we have begun? ...

It was begun by others, before our time.

... Can we leave them? ...

Dearest, we have played our part. It is for them to continue.

... But is it? ... is it? ...

Strange thoughts? They make me afraid!

... Strange to you perhaps because you have not known what I have known ...

Through you I can learn.

Not what I have known ... How could you? ... You do not know what it is like to be one of them ... how they feel ... how they suffer ... how could you?

... Oh, Dearest Heart, you do not know what it is like to be a man on this Earth ... you don't know ... you can never know ...

Through you I see. You are my heart and my eyes and my senses.—I see it all.

... Then ... you see why we cannot go home? ...

Many things ... many things I begin to see ... I see now why you had to suffer that accident on their ship, to lose all memory, to forget us and your home ... only so that you should know fully what it is to be a man ... only thus could your service be complete.

... It was no accident ...

Nothing is ever accident ... His plan allows no chance.

... And yet ... (strange thought) and yet I envy, yes, I envy them ...

Envy?

. . . I envy them, because through the bitter iron of their living they touch the depths and heights of the Universe. They shall mount up in their greatness and shall enter the Time of Splendour before us . . .

And it is our privilege to help them make it so . . .

She gazes a long while out into Space, and a tear runs down her soft cheek. Then she turns to me and winds her dear arms tight around me, gripping me, seeking courage.

No . . . No . . . We cannot go home . . . Not for a thousand years.

W. H. A.